

►New Product Workouts/More Movie Reviews◀

# Video Review

AUGUST 1989

THE  
WORLD  
AUTHORITY  
ON HOME  
VIDEO



01271 \$2.25/\$2.75 CANADA

## VIDEO TO GO

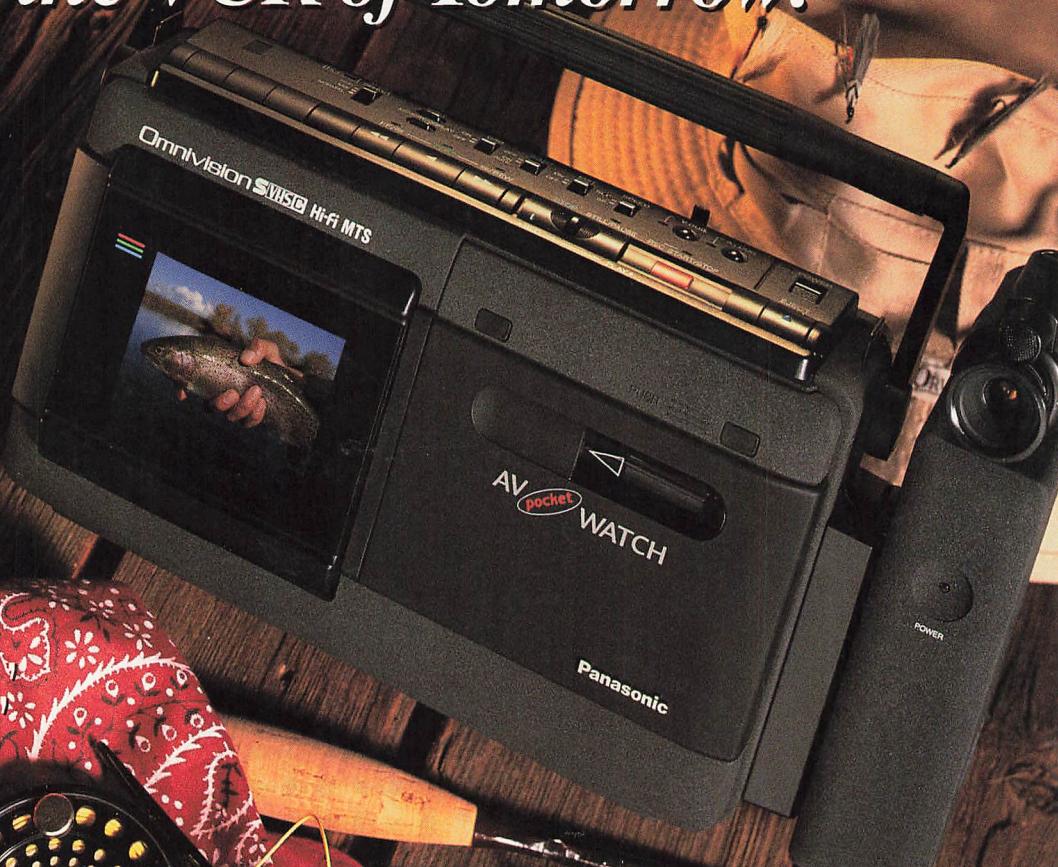
*Is This the VCR of Tomorrow?*

MOVIE SPECIAL:  
Leonard Maltin Picks  
His 40 Favorite Tapes

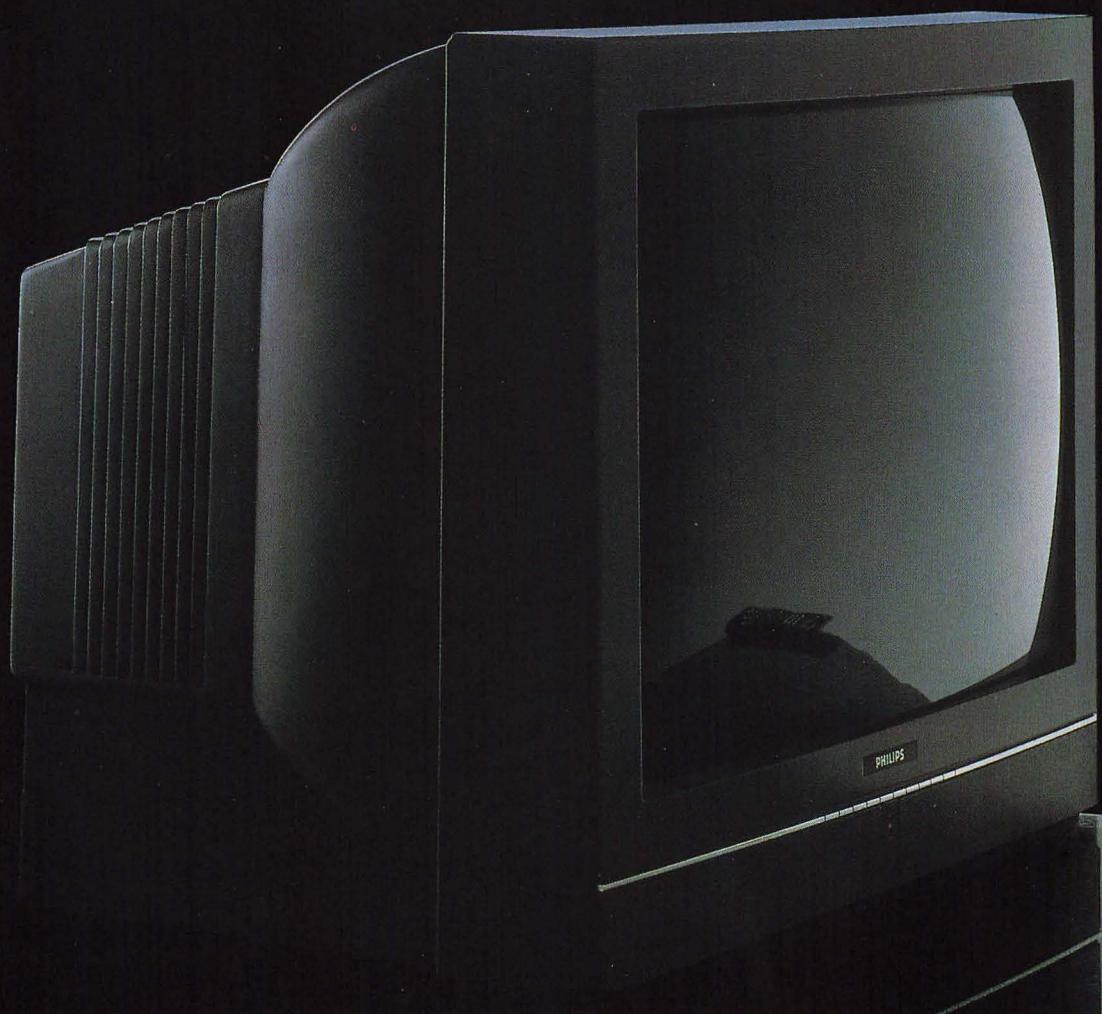
Technology Preview:  
Fall's Coolest Gear

LAB TESTS: S-VHS,  
TV Monitors, Laser

REVIEWS: 'Talk Radio',  
'Dangerous Liaisons',  
'Mississippi Burning'

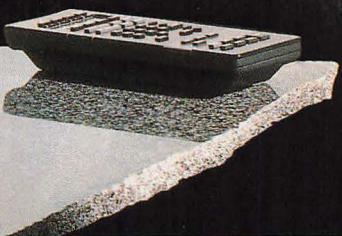


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*-Video Review*

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**PHILIPS**

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VOLUME 10, NUMBER 5

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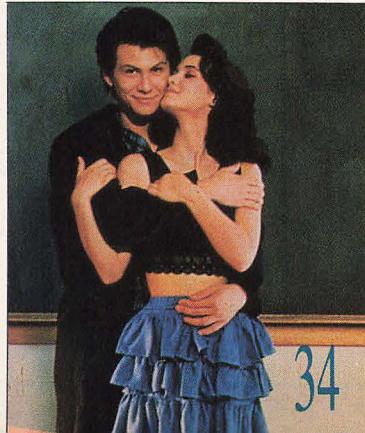
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**SOFTWARE COVER.** Cover photo: James McGoan. Davis photo: Jeff Slocumb/Outline. On the cover: Proton VT-296 monitor/receiver and RCA VR695HF S-VHS VCR.

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## Calling All Collectors

**V**ideo collectors were the real pioneers of home video. Many of the earliest VCRs were bought by maniacal movie buffs who painstakingly built up huge libraries—poring over broadcast schedules, staying up all hours to tape obscure classics off even more obscure cable channels, keeping fingers poised over pause buttons to edit out every interruption.

It's so much easier today. For a little more than the price video's earliest aficionados paid for blank tape, collectors today can buy some of Hollywood's most important classics on cassette. And, while TV tapers often had to contend with poor-quality prints, shortened TV versions and constant commercials, most of today's cassette editions offer pristine quality. (Of course, there are still a few low-price stinkers.) It's encouraging that, at the same time major movie studios are pushing movie prices lower than ever, many are also making a renewed commitment to quality. Paramount's recent announcement that all of its new \$14.95 titles will be recorded in the top-quality SP speed shows the direction the whole industry should take.



**JAMES B. MEIGS,**  
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

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The rapid growth in movie cassettes priced under \$25—and the parallel fall in disc prices—has created a brand-new boom in movie collecting. As a guide to those just getting started in the collecting habit, and as an aid to longtime video buffs who still have a few holes in their libraries, we asked *VR* contributor Leonard Maltin to give us his list of the movies that ought to be in every collection. We hope his movie guide encourages current collectors while spurring movie companies to keep those low-cost tapes coming.

We're also pleased this month to introduce FutureTech, a new regular feature in *VR* by author, futurist and TV producer Howard Blumenthal. As video—and the rest of us—approaches the 21st century, Blumenthal will chronicle the shape of entertainment technologies and programming to come.



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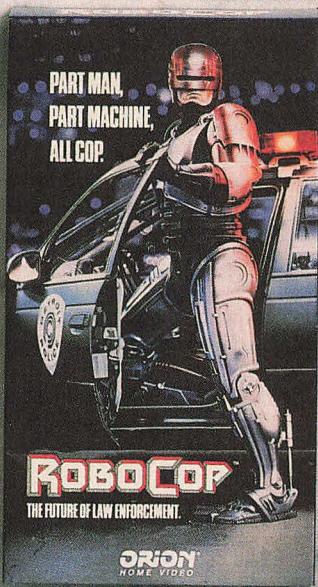
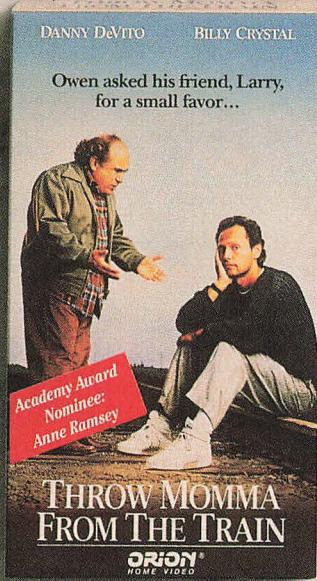
Dana Bonge

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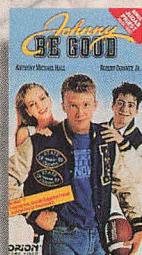
MALONE  
#8706, Rated R



FLORIDA STRAITS  
#8705, Rated PG-13



NO MAN'S LAND  
#8710, Rated R



JOHNNY BE GOOD  
#8715, Re-Rated R



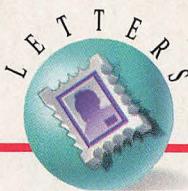
FROG  
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## Compact Dollars

In the April and May *Newsbreaks*, you report that VHS-C companies want their product to have better sales. Well, two things must happen before this comes true:

1. VHS-C tape must become more available.
2. The price should come down. For example, a good quality, two-hour, full-size VHS tape costs under \$8, a two-hour 8mm



tape about \$10. VHS-C tape is not easy to find, and a 20-minute tape can cost about \$6, making a two-hour recording worth \$36 at the standard-play speed.

Frank Tokuvchik  
Danbury, CT

## Speed Demons

The *Viewpoint* editorial in the June *VR* concerning the declining quality of pre-recorded VHS tapes ("Why Do You Think They Call It Dupe") addresses just one symptom of the poor standards endemic to home video. Since a generally lazy and ill-informed mass market was in no position to make correct choices, an overpromoted, multiple-licensed videotape format gained the upper hand, based primarily on 90 extra minutes of taping time at the slowest, worst recording speed.

J. Adam Koehler  
Milwaukee, WI

After reading the editorial, I asked two friends in the retail video business if they had problems with the slow recording speeds. One, employed by one of California's largest video outlets, says a number of slow-speed cassettes sold recently are coming back in droves from customers who not only can tell the difference but won't stand for it. The other friend says EP tapes are causing trouble with some customers who have older VCRs that won't play that speed and who are very angry at having rented a tape they can't watch.

As for me, I'm going to give a copy of the editorial to the manager of every video store I patronize and ask them for a commitment to give me a refund if and when I buy or rent a tape I have every reason to believe is SP

but turns out to be in a slower speed. If all consumers will do the same, perhaps we can teach the industry a lesson.

Jim Noble  
San Jose, CA

The editorial complains about the increasing use of slower speeds for duping commercial videotapes. On the right-hand column on that same page is an advertisement for Pioneer LaserDisc. Your concern about lower-quality pictures is eloquently answered! Maybe the tape companies should look at that ad, too.

David Mizer  
Wichita, KS

I, for one, notice no difference between tapes processed at different speeds. Video companies could produce the same movie at different speeds and let those who feel they must have an SP copy pay a premium.

Another point to consider is tape storage. I now have 100 movies, but on 115 cassettes. The problem with storage space could be lessened if each movie had been processed on one cassette.

Robert Schell  
Grantsville, WV

It seems that the video companies are just beginning to do to their VHS customers what they have always done to their Beta customers. Whereas the highest-quality Beta picture that most users can play back is Super Beta I (only a small minority of Beta VCRs can handle the even higher-quality Hi-Band or ED Beta pictures), virtually all prerecorded Beta tapes have been half-speed Beta II. One of the reasons VHS has assumed such a dominant market position is that, until now, most prerecorded VHS tapes have maximized that format's potential while the industry short-changed Beta tape purchasers with quality considerably below potential. The long-play and extended-play trend you mention is just the latest phase in the development of the mass-market mediocrity mentality.

Robert Thiele  
Portal, GA

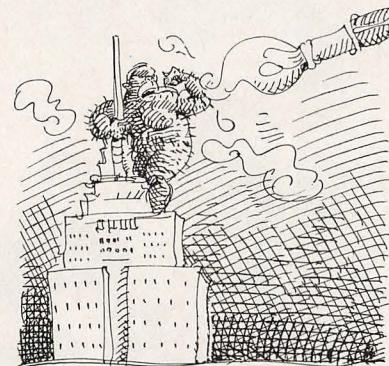
## Correction

Last month, an incorrect phone number for Toshiba was listed in the Hands-On column. The correct number is (201) 628-8000. *Video Review* regrets any confusion this may have caused.

## Colorized Kong

*King Kong* was designed as a black-and-white film and to even consider the colorized version is totally irresponsible. Moreover, some of what movie historian William K. Everson says in his review (May '89 *VR*) is utter rubbish. The color in no way resembles the old two-strip Technicolor of the early '30s, as is clearly evident by the home video releases of *Whoopee* and *King of Jazz*. In fact, video color doesn't even approach the gorgeously rich hues of two-strip Technicolor.

Everson claims prints of the film heretofore in release have been on the dark side, obscuring detail. I've run 35mm and 16mm prints over the past 20 years and all,

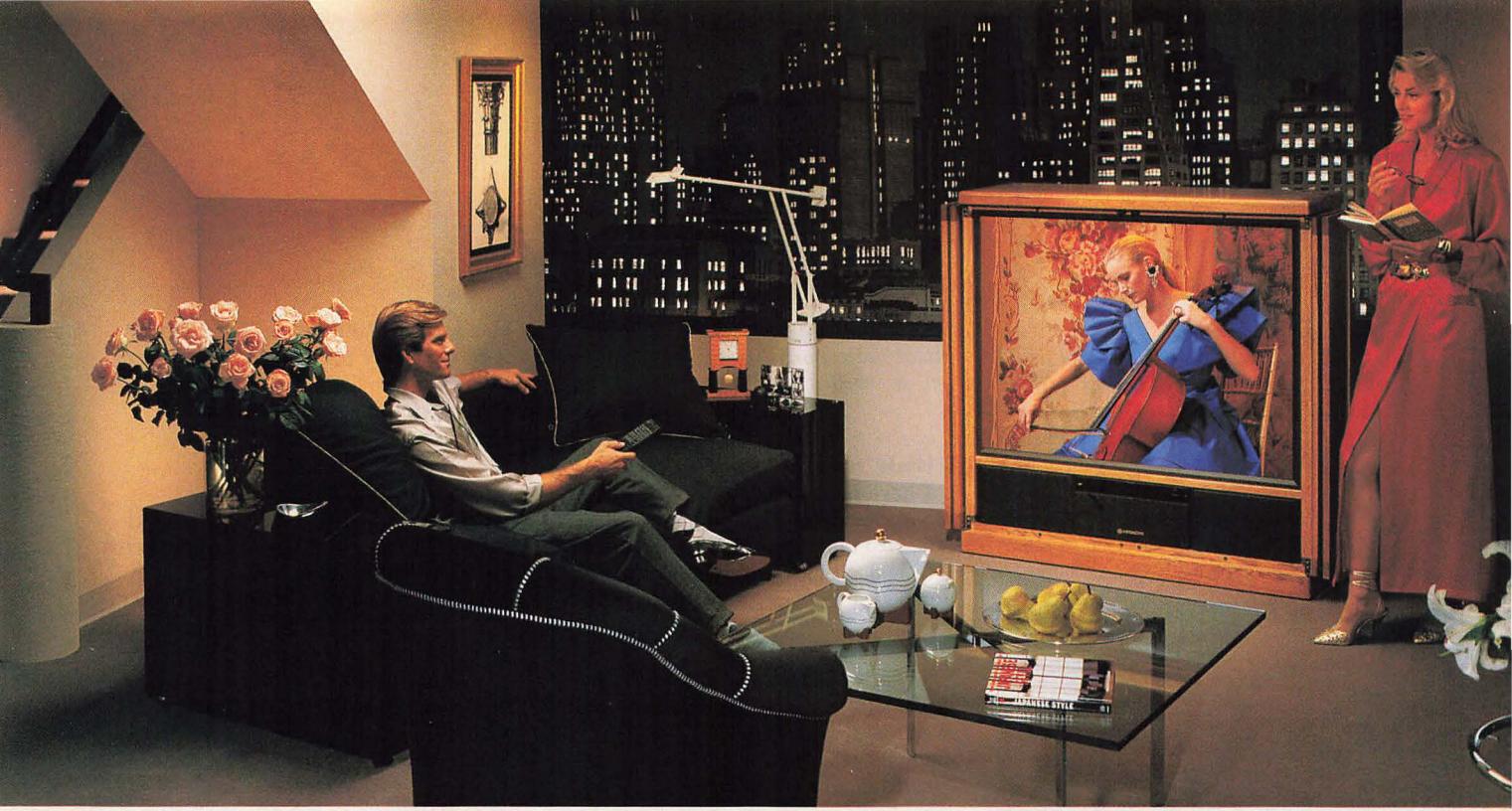


save one, were bright, crisp and sharp. My CED, laser disc and videotape versions are also crisp and clear. Everson's only valid point is that the so-called color destroys the aura of the city scenes and the foreboding atmosphere of the jungle scenes.

H.C. Bohanan  
Union, MI

•William K. Everson replies: I share your admiration for the qualities of the old two-strip Technicolor, but lacking one color it was never a realistic system. The color in the video releases of *Whoopee* and *King of Jazz* is, by the admission of their distributors, "color enhanced." I still maintain that the colorized *King Kong* has the look of old two-strip Technicolor.

It's well-known in the industry that the negative of *Kong* was retimed and darkened. Further, until Turner Entertainment was able to gain access to a slightly scratched 35mm roll of censored material, all of the reinsertions of this material into release prints came from 35mm blow-ups from a 16mm print, so a certain loss of quality was inevitable.



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### The King and I

Could you tell me if *The King and I* with Deborah Kerr was ever put on video? If so, where can I purchase it?

Ann Lampasona  
Revere, MA

This 1956 musical earned Yul Brynner an Oscar for his role as the King of Siam. An adaptation of the Rodgers and Hammer-



Kerr in the court of the King.

stein Broadway show, it features the songs "Getting to Know You" and "Shall We Dance." CBS/Fox did release it on cassette, but has since withdrawn the movie. Copies of it are still around, though, and can be rented by mail from Facets Video, (800) 331-6197, for \$10 for three to four days. It is, alas, not available for sale.

### The Ugly Dachshund

I am writing to find out about a movie called *The Ugly Dachshund*. I know it was available on tape, but I haven't been able to find it.

Wayne Monk  
Las Vegas, NV

Directed by Norman Tokar for Walt Disney Studios in 1966, *The Ugly Dachshund* stars Dean Jones and Suzanne Pleshette as dog fanciers. The movie was

As a service to our readers, Video Review will help track down hard-to-find tapes or discs. Send requests to Video Review's Video Hunter, 902 Broadway, New York, NY 10010. VR reserves the right to edit and condense selections for publication. Sorry, no personal replies.

pulled from the shelves by Walt Disney Home Video about two years ago. No word yet on whether it will be rereleased.

### Picnic at Hanging Rock

I have tried to locate *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, released by Vestron. I've been informed that it's been discontinued, and I've had no luck with distributors.

Michael Wilson  
Queens, NY

Trying to find this one was no, er, lunch in the park. Directed by Australian Peter Weir (*The Year of Living Dangerously*, *Gallipoli*, *Witness*), this movie follows a group of turn-of-the-century finishing-school girls on an outing from which three never return. It has indeed been discontinued by Vestron, but we did manage to locate a copy close to you. Rare Bird Video at 482 Broome St., New York, NY 10013, (212) 334-8150, has the title available for rental only. The price is \$6.50 (for non-members) per overnight rental.

### The Great Race

My wife has begged me for years to find a videocassette of *The Great Race*. Where can I find one?

Timothy McNulty  
Wailuku, HI

You may soon return to connubial bliss. In this 1965 Blake Edwards comedy, Tony Curtis, Jack Lemmon, Natalie Wood, Peter Falk and Keenan Wynn try to run each other off the road in a 1908 auto race from New York to Paris. It's available on cassette from Warner Home Video, and you should be able to order it from Movies Unlimited, 6736 Castor Ave., Philadelphia, PA 19149, (800) 523-0823, for \$59.95,

plus postage and handling. Sorry, there's no 800 number for Hawaii, but you can reach them at (215) 722-8298. A small price to pay for a happy marriage.

### Doctor Who

I need help finding the *Doctor Who* sci-fi TV series on VHS tape. Any help you can give will be appreciated.

Larry Callender  
Baton Rouge, LA

Playhouse Video, at 1211 Sixth Ave., New York, NY 10036, (212) 819-3238, currently has only seven titles from this British series available: "The Brain of Morbius," "The Day of the Daleks," "The Deadly Assassin," "Five Doctors," "Pyramids of Mars," "Revenge of the Cybermen" and "Robots of Death." The tapes are \$19.98 each. In Baton Rouge, you should be able to order them through two stores: Video Paradise, (504) 924-6938, or Video Palace, (504) 925-8448.

### Kit Carson

I am looking for a copy of the movie *Kit Carson*. Can you help me find it?

Lou Pizza  
Tamarac, FL

Maybe. Jon Hall stars as Kit Carson, wagon train scout, in this 1940 western. Plenty of Indians are felled along the way, climaxing with a battle scene at a besieged fort. In fact, the scene was so good they decided to use it again in 1950's *Davy Crockett, Indian Scout*. *Kit Carson* was originally released on videocassette by Fox Hills Video but has since fallen onto the company's expired-titles list. To continue your search, look to more established retailers that may still have a copy in stock.

*Curtis and Wood take a break from a grueling Great Race.*



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Note: All subscriptions subject to review. CBS Video Library reserves the right to reject or cancel any subscriptions. Canadian orders will be serviced through Toronto. Applicable sales tax added to all orders.

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# FREEZE FRAMES

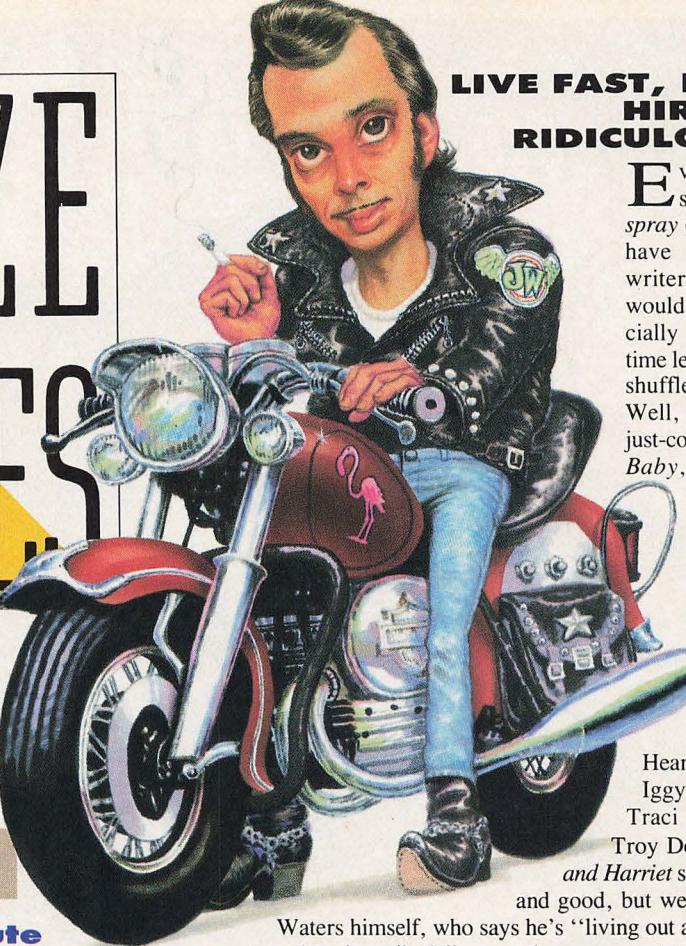
## VIDEO CRITIC OF THE MONTH

"The Pacific Institute series, which I recently had the privilege of reviewing, strikes me as a marvelously useful home video tool... a splendid basis for the kind of wholesome inner-family communication that often has been sadly lacking."

—Former Speaker of the House Jim Wright on a series of family-oriented educational videotapes produced by the Pacific Institute.

In the interest of historical accuracy, we note that Wright's wife Betty worked for the Pacific Institute at the time these remarks were made in the Dec. 9, 1985 Congressional Record. Nevertheless, we're convinced Wright's endorsement reflects nothing more than his sincere belief in the series' quality, offered without fear or favor, and we look forward to his views on other video releases, such as *Marilyn Chambers' Party Incorporated* (New World).

Wright photo: Wide World



## LIVE FAST, DIE YOUNG, HIRE A RIDICULOUS CAST

Ever since the surprise mainstream success of *Hairspray* (RCA/Columbia), people have been wondering what writer-director John Waters would do for an encore, especially since Divine, his long-time leading lady—er, man—has shuffled off this mortal coil. Well, now we know: Waters' just-completed new movie is *Cry Baby*, which he describes as "the ultimate juvenile delinquent comedy." Among the stars of this made-in-Baltimore extravaganza are 21 *Jump Street* heartthrob Johnny Depp and a whole bunch of formers—former bank robber Patty Hearst, former punk *bete noire* Iggy Pop, former pornlette Traci Lords, former teen idol Troy Donahue and former *Ozzie and Harriet* son David Nelson. All well and good, but we're a little worried about

Waters himself, who says he's "living out a fantasy. I always wanted to be a juvenile delinquent, but my parents wouldn't let me." Hmm. John Waters as the Fonz. That's too high concept even for us.

• • • •

## CULTURAL ILLITERACY, PART I



You'd think that after the enormous success of director James Cameron's *Aliens*, his current underwater horror epic *The Abyss* would be an easy sell for its studio, 20th Century-Fox. Not so, according to an alarming story in *The New York Times*. Seems that Fox's market research turned up—too late—the fact that most moviegoers don't know what an abyss is, or even how to pronounce the word. At presstime, rumors that *The Abyss* will be retitled *Glug! Glug! Glug!* for home video release could not be confirmed.



## MEDIA ARROGANCE MARCHES ON

There are some mysteries that perhaps will never be solved, and for us, one such riddle has always been the identity of the actress who played the back of Patty Duke's head on the old '60s sitcom (you remember, the one about cousins so identical that "you could lose your mind"). For years, we've lain awake nights wondering who the woman was and whatever became of her, and thus, we were near-paralytic with excitement when the Nickelodeon cable network recently announced it was blowing the lid off the story and bringing the actress face front at last.

Well, call us naive, but we were outraged when the much-hyped extravaganza finally aired. The Nickelodeon people didn't produce the woman; instead, they treated us to a patently fake documentary (*The Back Is Back*) with an obvious ringer in her place. In short, it was all a scam, a ratings ploy. Naturally, we called Nickelodeon to find out

what was going on.

"We actually did try to find her," insists Nickelodeon producer Will McRobb, adding that when they didn't, his staff had a real brainstorm. "We thought, let's do something better—let's do a hoax," McRobb says.

We're sure that sounded like a great idea at the time. But fair is fair. So we thought maybe Freeze-Frames should do a hoax, too. Well, we have, and you're reading it. That's right, everything in this

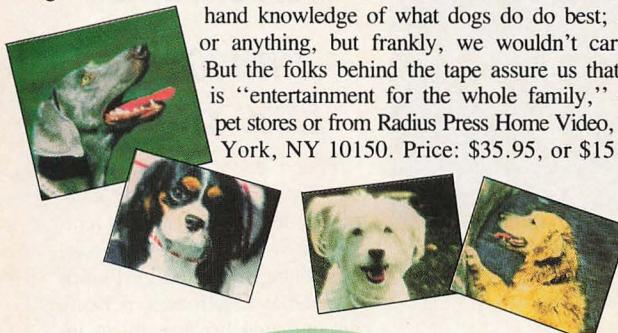
month's column—including this item—is completely made up. Fabricated. Totally bogus. Not a word is true. Not one. Honest. We're not kidding. Meanwhile, Nickelodeon says the ersatz Duke special will be rebroadcast this fall—assuming, of course, you can believe either them or us.



### DOGGY STYLE

**N**othing, sayeth the sages, is as powerful as an idea whose time has come. In that spirit, then, we note with no little concern the release of *Doggedy Dog Dog*, a 55-minute videocassette described by its creators as "a fast-paced film of over 300 absolutely precious dogs romping the streets and parks of Gotham...doing everything dogs do best."

We suppose it had to happen; after all, as *DDD*'s cinematographer Sam "Kash" Kashigan notes, nature documentaries of sharks, lions and elephants have long appealed to the public, so why not man's best friends? Still, we're a little puzzled by the video's stated *raison d'être*. Fact is, we have actually gone for a walk in Central Park on more than one occasion and thus have firsthand knowledge of what dogs do best; not to be squeamish or anything, but frankly, we wouldn't care to see it on TV. But the folks behind the tape assure us that *Doggedy Dog Dog* is "entertainment for the whole family," and it's available at pet stores or from Radius Press Home Video, P.O. Box 1271, New York, NY 10150. Price: \$35.95, or \$151.65 in dog dollars.



### RADAR LOVE

If you're one of those pioneer spirits whose blood boils at the thought of the 55 mph speed limit—and have the tickets to prove it—here's good news. The folks at RADAR (Radio Association Defending Airwave Rights Inc.) are offering a videotape with the lowdown on beating those pesky electronic speedtraps so beloved of the highway patrol. The brainchild of *Road and Track* writer John Tomerlin and Dale Smith (inventor of the Fuzzbuster radar detector), the 34-minute tape describes how police radar works and how to challenge it in court—the latter especially useful in Connecticut, Virginia and Washington, DC, where radar detectors are illegal. Of course, we have never, ever exceeded a legal speed limit, but if you have (or just plan to), the *Radar on Trial* videotape, with an accompanying book, is available for \$30 from RADAR Inc., 4949 S. 25A, Tipp City, OH 45371.

### CULTURAL ILLITERACY, PART II

**A**ccording to statistics compiled by Nielsen Media Research, the 75 top-rated individual TV programs broadcast from 1960 to 1989 include—along with such well-remembered benchmarks of the medium as the *M\*A\*S\*H* farewell show and various Super Bowls—an astonishing 10 different episodes of *The Beverly Hillbillies*. Weird, huh? Well, we think so, although if there are VR readers out there so versed in TV arcana that they can remember the plot of any of those episodes, we'd like to meet them, if not shake their hands.

### HIT LIST

LAST MONTH	TOP TAPES	THIS MONTH	TOP DISCS	LAST MONTH
—	<b>TWINS</b> MCA—\$89.95	1	<b>BIG</b> CBS/Fox LV—\$39.98	—
1	<b>COMING TO AMERICA</b> Paramount—no list price	2	<b>A FISH CALLED WANDA</b> CBS/Fox LV—\$39.98	1
—	<b>EVERYBODY'S ALL AMERICAN</b> Warner—\$89.95	3	<b>"CROCODILE" DUNDEE II</b> Paramount LV—\$24.95	—
2	<b>BIG</b> CBS/Fox—\$89.98	4	<b>TUCKER</b> Paramount LV—\$24.95	—
—	<b>DIRTY ROTTEN SCOUNDRELS</b> Orion—\$89.98	5	<b>RUNNING ON EMPTY</b> Warner LV—\$24.95	—
—	<b>A CRY IN THE DARK</b> Warner—\$89.95	6	<b>THE ACCUSED</b> Warner LV—\$34.95	—
3	<b>COCKTAIL</b> Touchstone—\$89.95	7	<b>BETRAYED</b> MGM/UA LV—\$39.95	—
4	<b>THE ACCUSED</b> Paramount—no list price	8	<b>DIE HARD</b> CBS/Fox LV—\$49.98	3
—	<b>ALIEN NATION</b> CBS/Fox—\$89.98	9	<b>THE PRESIDIO</b> Paramount LV—\$24.95	—
—	<b>THE ACCIDENTAL TOURIST</b> Warner—\$89.95	10	<b>THEY LIVE</b> MCA LV—\$34.95	—

"Hit List" is based on a nationwide survey of leading video software specialty stores, chains, mass merchandisers and wholesalers. The list includes titles taken from retailers' current top tape and disc lists as well as distributors' prerelease sales printouts.

# NEWSBREAKS

CD-I TEAM-UP... VIDEOGAME DEBUT...



LEVY ON SETS... TV TUBE MOVE

## F.Y.I.

### MACROVISION MILESTONE

MACROVISION CORP., THE company behind the controversial anti-copy process, encoded its 150 millionth videocassette in April. Companies currently using Macrovision in their tapes include CBS/Fox, Disney, HBO, MCA, MGM/UA, Orion and Warner.

### BIG THREE GO CD-I

THREE OF THE WORLD'S largest consumer electronics firms, Matsushita, Philips and Sony, will team up to design and promote compact disc-interactive (CD-I) technology. With CD-I, audio, full-motion video, still images, text, computer graphics and data can be stored on a standard optical laser disc.

### MAGNANIMOUS MAGNUM

MAGNUM ENTERTAINMENT has instituted a new lifetime guarantee on all of its videocassettes. Dealers just have to send the defective title back to the company, with \$7 for postage and handling, and they'll receive a brand-new tape.

### TIME-CODE TECH FOR VHS

NEW TIME-CODE AND addressing technology, patented by GSE Electronic Systems Inc., has been accepted by VHS-licenser JVC as a new industry standard. The technology, dubbed RAPID, enables frame-exact random access to any point on half-inch videotape, allowing more precise editing.

### NEC LAUNCHES VIDGAME

NEC HAS ANNOUNCED it is entering the videogame market with TurboGrafx-16, an expandable system with a 16-bit graphics processor and optional CD player. The system, scheduled to hit stores in the fall, is expected to have a list price of \$199.

### PORN BILL TKO'D

CONTROVERSIAL PROVISIONS of the 1988 Child Protection and Obscenity Enforcement Act, which placed strict record-keeping requirements on producers and distributors of material deemed "sexually explicit," have been held unconstitutional by a Federal judge. At present, the Justice Department had not yet decided to appeal the ruling.

## HDTV FUND

# Zenith Asks Senate for Tax on New TVs

By Robert Gerson

Zenith Chairman and CEO Jerry Pearlman has an answer to the problem of how to fund high-definition television development in the US: a tax on the sale of all new color TVs.

"Not too many industries ever say, 'Tax us to help pay for what we need,' but that's exactly what we propose," Pearlman said in a

recent appearance before a Senate subcommittee looking into the HDTV issue. Pearlman's plan calls for a levy of \$5 on each new TV, with the proceeds subsidizing HDTV research by US manufacturers. The tax would be dropped after four or five years, and replaced by one on the sale of HDTV receivers and transmission equipment. The excise tax, something the TV industry

hasn't seen since 1965, would raise approximately \$100 million a year, assuming the level of demand for new color TVs holds constant.

But even that sum would amount to little more than a drop in the bucket, according to the American Electronic Association, a trade group. In its presentation to the Senate, the AEA said government support to the tune of \$1.3 billion, in the form of grants, loans and loan guarantees, is necessary for the industry to come up with a viable American HDTV system.



These magic moments: Wizard rerelease will add 17 minutes.

## OZ REISSUE

# NEW WIZARD WITH EXTRAS

By Gregory P. Fagan

MGM/UA Home Video's new collector's edition of *The Wizard of Oz*, due in stores August 15, will include 17 minutes of extra footage and a 32-page booklet.

As part of an \$8.5 million promotional campaign to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the movie's theatrical release, the \$24.95 tape will be packaged with a \$5 rebate coupon and open with a one-minute commercial for Downy fabric softener. The accompanying CLV laser disc

release of *Oz* will lack the commercial and coupon, but will also sell for \$24.95.

The movie, which had been offered at a low price before MGM/UA pulled it from release last year, has been newly transferred using advanced digital audio and video transfer processes, an MGM/UA spokesperson says. The added footage, which appears at the close of the tape, includes the "Jitterbug" sequence, which was dropped from the picture before its release, and one of the movie's theatrical trailers.

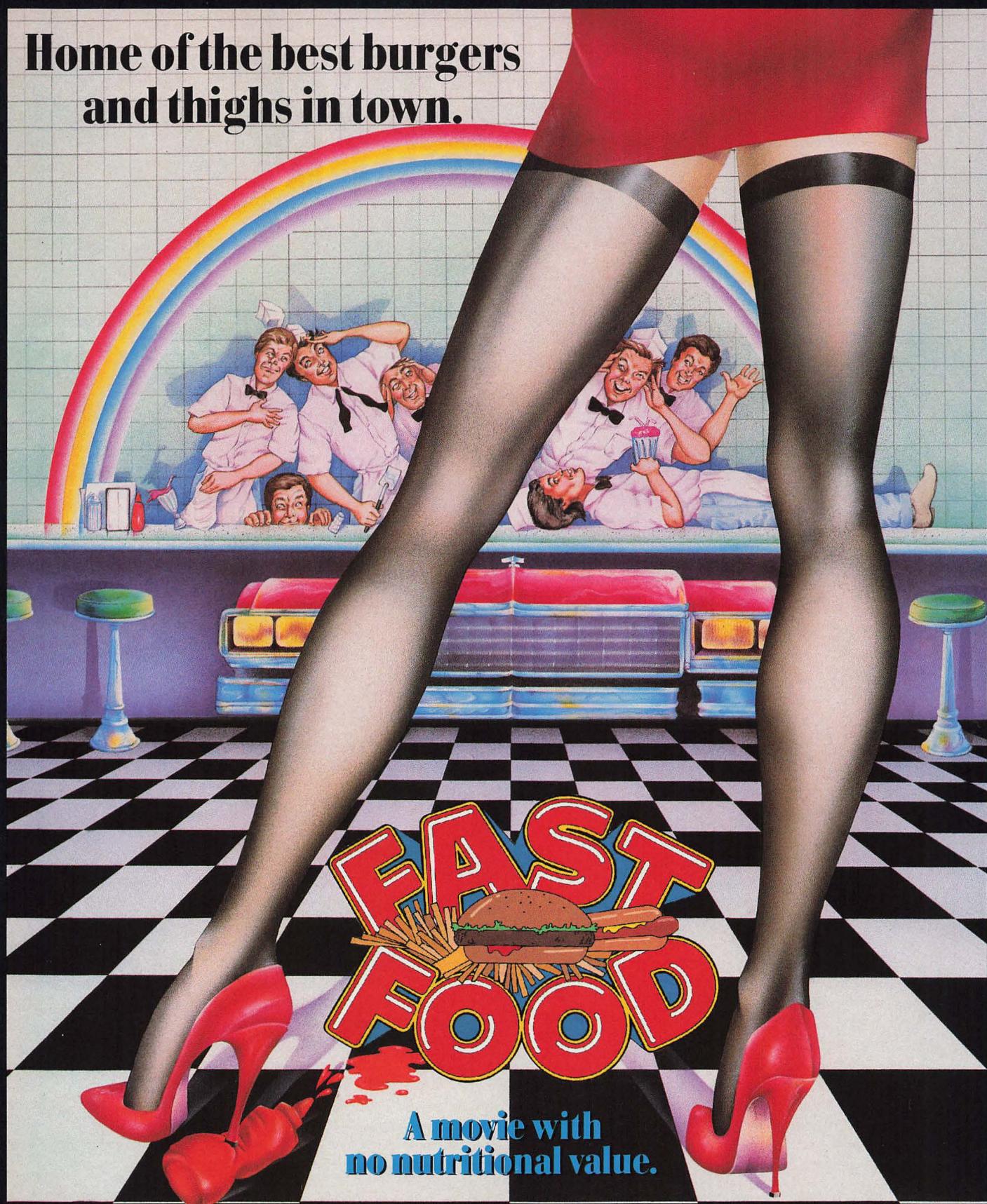
## TUBE SHORTAGE

# Philco TV Line Halted

Philco, one of the first American TV brands, is fading from the scene this year, at least temporarily. The Philco TV line, now being marketed by Philips Consumer Electronics, is being discontinued because of an industry-wide picture tube shortage.

Philips, which also manufactures and markets TVs here under the Magnavox, Sylvania and Philips brands, has been unable to get enough tubes to meet the demand for new sets, says Rick Policicchio, sales vice president. Halting production of Philco TVs, the company's lowest-priced line, will free up supplies for the other three brands. Policicchio says Philco VCRs and audio products will continue to be sold and that the plan is to bring Philco back into the TV market when the tube supply situation eases. (R.G.)

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Directed by **Michael A. Simpson**

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Some Material May Be Inappropriate for Children Under 13

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# BEYOND VIDEOTAPE

BY HOWARD J. BLUMENTHAL

**C**onsider the videocassette. Although it is the foundation of the entire video industry—over 1 billion have been sold worldwide, according to one estimate—its days may be numbered. After all, today's cassettes have some serious disadvantages: As any video collector knows, they're bulky and hard to store; their images degrade with repeated use; and their slow rewind and fast-forward times make them ill-suited to interactive programs. And the problems aren't limited to cassettes. Even videodiscs, although

superior in most respects to tape, can be awkward to ship and store.

Wouldn't it be nice to have complete video movies stored on a pocket-sized disc or, better yet, on something the size of a credit card?

The idea is not very far-fetched. In fact, it may not be long before videocassettes—and possibly video stores—are a memory, replaced by far more efficient ways to deliver movies and other programming. These methods would not only address problems of size, but could also save money by eliminating the expensive process of videotape duplication. With recent advances

in digital video, solid-state computer memory and recordable videodisc technology, the prospects for a compact, high-quality replacement for current tapes and discs look better than ever. The question is when such technology might arrive.

### In the Cards

One likely candidate for the home videocassette of the future is the so-called "smart card," which resembles a credit card but packs a lot of data. If companies investigating the idea (such as Japanese industrial giant Matsushita) have their way, smart cards will soon replace certain printed

items. Food stamps, airline tickets, prescription forms and lottery tickets, for example, won't be on paper anymore; rather, folks will carry cards that can be regularly updated by a smart terminal. The principle is not unlike that behind the Nintendo videogame cartridges. Insertable data cards are already used in handheld electronic dictionaries and

**IN THE  
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WILL THE VIDEOCASSETTE  
GO THE WAY  
OF THE BUGGY WHIP?**

organizers, such as Sharp's Wizard system. And Toshiba recently unveiled a prototype still-video camera that can record up to five frames of still video on a data card.

Today's generation of smart cards typically contain one or more computer chips and a predetermined amount of memory, but no moving parts. The power of the chip and the size of the memory are limited by present-day technology. Right now, it's possible to store one megabyte of data on a single card, but this is costly—a blank card sells for more than \$1,000. Costs will drop as more smart-card applications materialize.

But cost isn't the only obstacle blocking videocards. To store as little as five minutes

*VR contributing editor Howard Blumenthal is the author of The Electronic Home Companion (Andrews and McNeel). Watch for more of his FutureTech reports covering video's long-range development.*



of video, a computer requires more than a gigabyte (one million kilobytes, or the equivalent of nearly a thousand floppy diskettes) of memory. The vast amount of memory needed to record an entire movie is still almost unimaginable. Sheer storage, however, is only part of the story. The Paperback Movies Project, headed by Andy Lippman at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Media Lab, has shown that the amount of data in digitized video programs can be compressed (without altering the video program) by working only with the visual information that *changes* from one frame to the next. The convergence of these two trends—the falling cost of memory storage and improvements in data compression—will help bring the videocard closer to reality. The cost could reach practical, consumer levels within 10 years.

The videocard will probably have the height and width and be about three times the thickness of a credit card, featuring the movie's logo on the front and pictures of the stars on the back. Encased in metal or hard plastic, the videocard will have a few small holes on one of its edges. These holes will give the playback device access to the chip encased in the card. A holographic "assurance of quality" seal could make the cards difficult to duplicate illegally.

## The Changing View

If and when they arrive, videocards will have a profound effect on how we rent, buy and watch movies and other programming. Smaller software means smaller hardware, and these cards will be about one-tenth the size of 8mm cassettes. Hypothetically, a Sony "Video Cardman" would be the size of a *thin* paperback book. Airborne movie-watching would change completely—instead of an airline imposing its choice on viewers, viewers would choose from a library of cards and watch a movie on an LCD screen built into the back of the seat in front of them. With no moving parts or tape to wear out, videocards could theoretically provide an infinite number of plays with no reduction in quality. And with no need to shuttle from one part of a tape to another, access to any portion of a program would be instantaneous.

With the arrival of the videocard, the video store as we know it could radically change or even disappear. The entire inventory of your local video emporium could be stored in a single vending machine (with transactions charged to an American Express "Smart Card," of course). Supermarket checkout counters could stock a few dozen titles just above the individually wrapped candy bars. At home, a collection

of 200 movies could be slotted into 20 plastic storage sheets (10 per page) and put into a one-inch-thick, loose-leaf binder. On the other hand, the advent of the videocard may not mean the end of the video rental. The first generation of cards may well be too expensive for most buyers and end up restricted to rental stores. (The cards could also address Hollywood's perennial concerns about illicit duplication and non-receipt of rental revenues, by including a play-counting circuit and dupe-foiling encoding of the digital signal.)

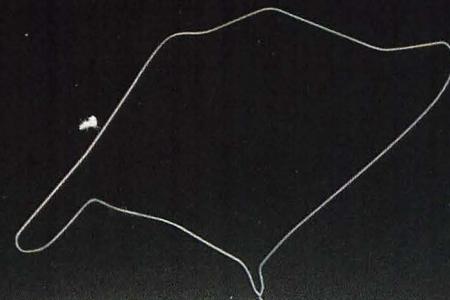
## The Incredible Shrinking Videodisc

The videocard is not the only substitute for the videocassette. Another alternate format is already with us: the laser videodisc. One-time recordable laser videodiscs are already being used in industrial applications, and discs that can be recorded on and erased many times are currently being demonstrated. At the same time, smaller laser videodiscs are being developed with longer running times than those currently available in such formats as CD-V, which only holds five minutes of moving video.

The same factors that make videocards theoretically possible suggest that laser videodiscs may replace videocassettes in the near future, perhaps as an interim step toward videocards. While a movie on a 12-inch disc may seem cumbersome in this CD age, movies on CD-sized five-inch discs are already within sight of current technology.

Some form of small laser videodisc or even videocard could well be a reality within the first few years of the next century. But before you decide to cash in your VCR, consider two other trends that make the arrival of either technology an open question. One is the approach of high-definition television. By drastically improving the size and quality of TV images, HDTV will also raise the amount of data required to store the pictures, thus possibly pushing the arrival of tiny storage technologies further into the future. The other trend is the gradual spread of fiber optics and different high-powered data transmission systems throughout the nation's communications network. Any video picture that can be digitized can also be dispatched via phone or data transmission lines. At some point in the next century, when every home is wired with fiber optic cable, it may be possible to order up virtually any movie for instantaneous delivery at the touch of a button—truly the ultimate in impulse pay-per-view, completely eliminating the cable company middleman. And that would beat even videocards for convenience. □





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With movies becoming less expensive than ever to own, there has never been a better time to build a video library. In this special guide, Leonard Maltin, America's most trusted movie critic, gives his suggestions for 40 indispensable classics. Also: profiles of three ardent collectors, plus the 10 Commandments of Tape and Disc Preservation.

# MALTIN'S TOP 40

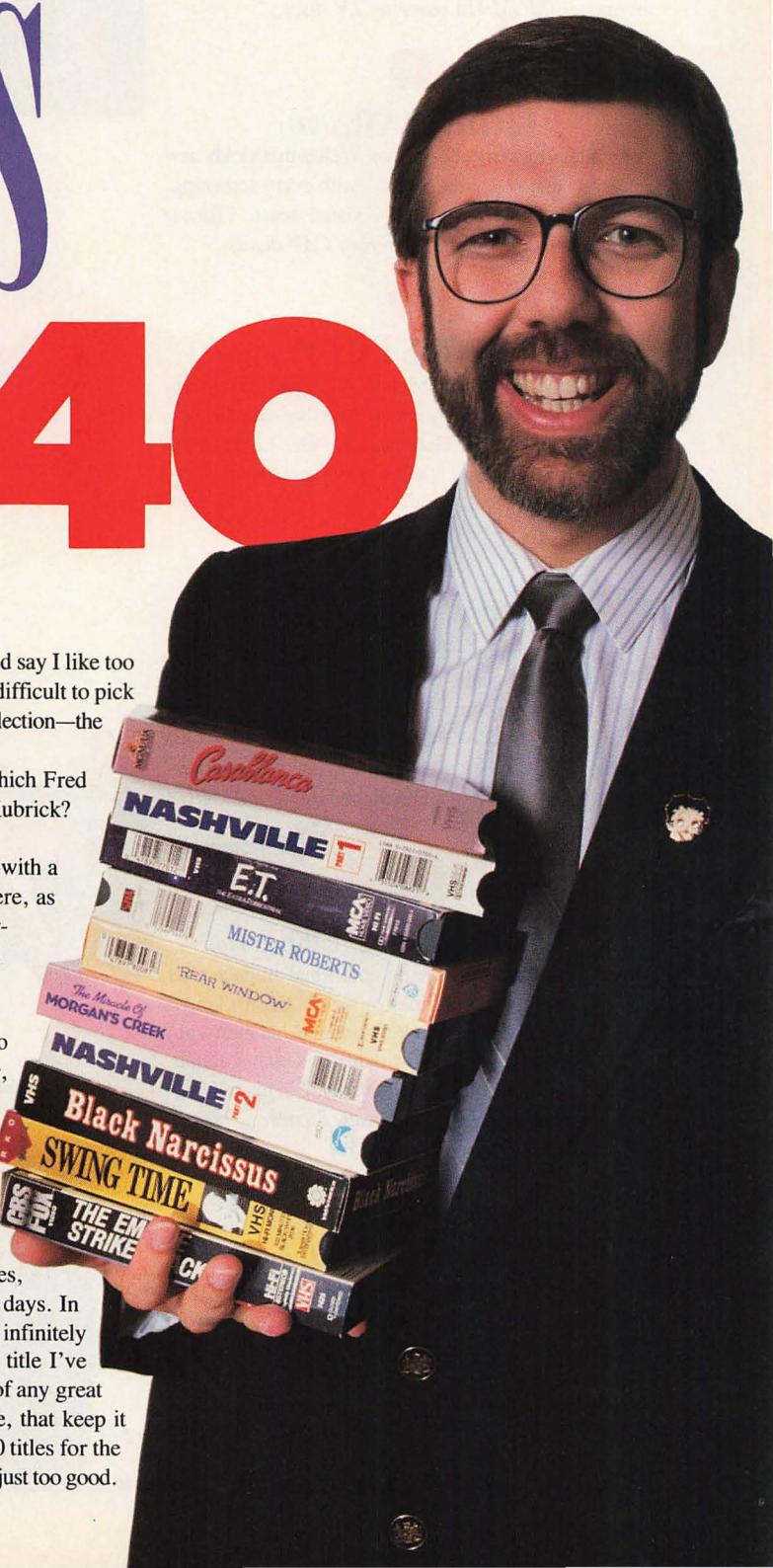
The trouble is I like movies too much. Or perhaps I should say I like too many movies. In either case, I've found it surprisingly difficult to pick 40 movies that I believe to be the indispensable core of a home video collection—the movies everyone should have.

After all, how do you pick just one Hitchcock or one Chaplin? Which Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers musical? Which John Ford or which Stanley Kubrick? Can I sincerely recommend only one Marx Brothers movie?

After much soul-searching, I have settled on the list that follows—with a number of qualifications. For example, there are no foreign films here, as I don't think they are usually best served by the video medium; nevertheless, leaving out Renoir's *The Grand Illusion*, Kurosawa's *The Seven Samurai*, Lang's *M* or Fellini's *8½* is difficult. I also omitted silent movies for the same arbitrary reason: I feel that silents should be seen on a big screen, so you can become enveloped by them. But if video is your medium of choice, then you would surely want *The Big Parade*, *The Last Command*, *Show People*, *The Crowd* or *The Wedding March*, to name just a few silents that are available in top-quality video transfers.

I have also left out short subjects and cartoons. No library can be complete without a good selection of cartoons from Disney, Fleischer, Warner Bros. and MGM. Not to mention the comedy shorts of Laurel and Hardy and the Little Rascals.

That said, here's my highly arbitrary Top 40 list of feature movies, arranged in a strictly personal order. Omissions could be argued for days. In fact, that's the great thing about video collecting: Every collection is infinitely expandable. So this list is just a beginning. But I'll stand by every title I've included. To me, these are the movies that should form the bedrock of any great movie collection. Each one has special qualities that make it unique, that keep it fresh through repeated viewings. If I were forced to live with these 40 titles for the rest of my life, I don't think I'd ever grow tired of any of them. They're just too good.



1

### CASABLANCA (1943)

My candidate for the greatest Hollywood movie ever made. Every line counts. Every camera movement heightens the drama. Every role down to the tiniest bit is cast to perfection. They just don't make 'em like this anymore. (MGM/UA cassette, LV disc)



1

2

### CITIZEN KANE (1941)

A unique achievement by Orson Welles that yields new insights—and new amazement—with every screening. Audacious, intelligent and a visual feast. (Turner cassette; Image LV and Criterion CAV discs)

3

### THE MALTESE FALCON (1941)

John Huston's directorial debut. A hardboiled mystery tale with not a wasted moment. And that cast: Bogart, Mary Astor, Sydney Greenstreet, Peter Lorre, all in rare form—with many others too numerous to mention. (MGM/UA cassette, LV disc)

4

### SINGIN' IN THE RAIN (1952)

A Hollywood musical that is itself a tribute to the Hollywood musical—with a freshness and vitality that never wear out. I think it's fair to say that Gene Kelly, Donald O'Connor and Debbie Reynolds have never been better. Ditto for those witty screenwriters Betty Comden and Adolph Green. (MGM/UA cassette, LV disc)

5

### IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE (1946)



How can a movie retain its emotional impact after you've seen it a dozen times or more? I don't know, but this one does, as Frank Capra and his alter ego, James Stewart, take us to the depth of a man's disillusionment with life, and then let us share in his redemption. (Media and Republic cassettes; Pioneer LV and Criterion CAV discs)

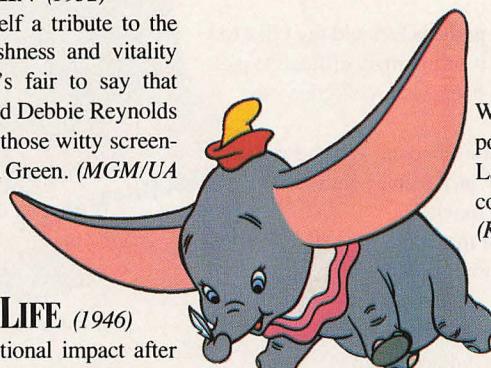
6

### THE WIZARD OF OZ (1939)

Arguably the greatest fantasy movie ever made. A joyous and colorful tale that has imbedded itself in our collective consciousness as few others have—and, just like the best stories and fables, it will never grow old. (MGM/UA cassette [new 50th anniversary edition]; Criterion CAV disc)



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### GONE WITH THE WIND (1939)

Storytelling at its peak. A massive novel on film that moves like the wind—and carries us along. Clark Gable and Vivien Leigh are the personification of screen charisma, and producer David O. Selznick's eye for detail pays off in every scene. (MGM/UA cassette, LV disc)



8

### DUMBO (1941)

Can there be one Walt Disney cartoon feature that stands above the rest? The answer is personal, but this one has a special place in my heart: It makes me cry, it makes me smile and, in its greatest moments of imagination (like the Pink Elephants sequence), it leaves me breathless. (Walt Disney cassette, LV disc)

9

### A NIGHT AT THE OPERA (1935)

Groucho, Harpo and Chico are perfectly served by this slick MGM comedy that offers some of the boys' greatest routines and set pieces. What's more, the musical and romantic interludes (usually a nuisance in Marx pictures) are entertaining as well. (MGM/UA cassette; Criterion CAV disc)

10

### IT'S A GIFT (1934)

W.C. Fields at the peak of his powers—and that's powerfully funny indeed. The mere thought of Carl LaFong and Mr. Muckle starts me laughing; encountering them anew on my screen is always a treat. (KVC cassette; Image and Pioneer LV discs)

11

### MODERN TIMES (1936)

Isolating one Chaplin movie is tough, but this one speaks with the most contemporary voice, and its social satire is as biting as ever. Paired with peerless slapstick scenes and an appealing Paulette Goddard, it's pretty hard to beat. (Key cassette)

12

### ALL ABOUT EVE (1950)

Was there really a time when Hollywood dared be this witty, this sophisticated, this intelligent? Writer-director Joseph L. Mankiewicz makes most of contemporary moviemaking look like mush with this brilliant picture. Bette Davis and her sterling co-stars (including a young Marilyn Monroe) are ideal. (Key cassette)

13

### SUNSET BOULEVARD (1950)

A unique perspective on Hollywood permeates this darkly comic, richly sardonic movie directed and co-written by the great Billy Wilder. Gloria Swanson has the role of a lifetime as a faded silent-movie queen. (Paramount cassette, LV disc)

14

### SWING TIME (1936)

It's a tossup between this and *Top Hat* as the quintessential Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers dance musical, but I vote for this one. If it consisted of only one number, Jerome Kern and Dorothy Fields' "Pick Yourself Up," I'd be content. Watching Fred and Ginger together is exhilarating. (Turner cassette; Criterion CAV disc)

15

### KING KONG (1933)

Very few movies become part of our national lore, but this one has—and rightly so. It's fantasy-adventure at its best, with special effects that still amaze and (more important) allow us to believe. (Turner cassette; Criterion CAV disc)

16

### STAGECOACH (1939)

John Ford's classic western simply gets better with age. The Indian attack has never been equaled—nor, for that matter, has the unique interplay among disparate characters. Young John Wayne reveals what star quality is all about. (Warner cassette)

17

### THE 39 STEPS (1935)

Alfred Hitchcock reached an early peak with this British gem that gracefully and effortlessly mixes suspense, sex and wit in equal doses. Robert Donat and Madeleine Carroll are superb in the leads. Forget the two remakes. (KVC, Discount and Video Yesteryear cassettes)

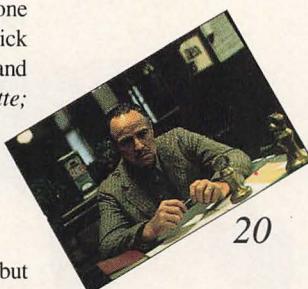
18

### REAR WINDOW (1954)

Only Hitchcock could set himself a challenge like this and clear its hurdles so entertainingly: a leading man (James Stewart) confined to a wheelchair and a pattern of suspense played out in long shot across a courtyard. Clearly the work of a master. (MCA cassette, LV disc)



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### 42ND STREET (1933)

The definitive Busby Berkeley backstage musical still works its charm, despite its antique ways. Perhaps it's the energy, or perhaps it's the pre-Production Code spice. Either way, this early talkie has more guts, and more gumption, than its much tamer stage revival of recent years. With Warner Baxter, Ruby Keeler, Dick Powell, Ginger Rogers. (MGM/UA cassette [scheduled for fall release]; Pioneer and Image LV discs)

20

### THE GODFATHER (1972) and THE GODFATHER PART II (1974)

The gangster movie reached new heights of drama and involvement in the hands of author Mario Puzo and director Francis Ford Coppola. And the curse of most movie sequels is broken by a follow-up that in some ways is even better than the original. There's also a re-edited-for-video *The Godfather: The Complete Epic* (1981), which reworks the two original movies in chronological sequence and includes footage not in either one, but I must admit I've never caught up with it. With Marlon Brando, Al Pacino, Robert De Niro, Diane Keaton, James Caan, Robert Duvall. (Paramount cassettes, LV discs)



21

### NASHVILLE (1975)

Robert Altman's epic, multicharacter drama seemed incredibly exciting when it first appeared, and it still packs the same punch today, with a spontaneity and a credibility that are rare. With Ronee Blakley, Karen Black, Keith Carradine, Lily Tomlin, Henry Gibson, Shelley Duvall. (Paramount cassette, LV disc)

22

### MISTER ROBERTS (1955)

Henry Fonda, James Cagney, Jack Lemmon and William Powell in a wonderful comedy that showcases four great actors at their best. Rarely has a Broadway play come to the screen and shown no trace of its stage origins. (Warner cassette)

23

### BLACK NARCISSUS (1946)

The writer-director team of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger is best known for *The Red Shoes*, but this steamy melodrama is even better: emotional and exotic. It's also the most beautiful Technicolor movie ever made. With Deborah Kerr, Jean Simmons, Sabu. (Video America cassette; Criterion CLV disc)

24

## THE MIRACLE OF MORGAN'S CREEK (1944)

Preston Sturges made a handful of great comedies in the '40s, all of which are required viewing—though this one offers more belly laughs than any of the others. It's outrageous, fall-down funny (and that's literally true). (Paramount cassette)



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## THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK (1984)

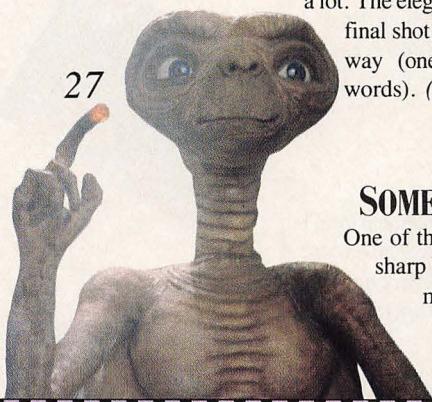
Of the modern-day special-effects, outer-space sagas, I find this one's the best. It assumes you've seen its predecessor, *Star Wars*, but it tops the original in a number of ways. Saturday matinee adventurers never had it so good. With Mark Hamill, Carrie Fisher, Harrison Ford, Alec Guinness. (CBS/Fox cassette; Image LV disc)

26

## THE ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN MARVEL (1941)

The best serial ever made—naive by today's standards but still an awful lot of fun, with great stuntwork and impressive special effects. And you don't have to wait

27



27

## E.T. THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL (1982)

A contemporary fable that touches all hearts, all generations. Despite the fantasy trappings, it's really about innocence lost and found, and perhaps that's why it appeals to the child in all of us. (MCA cassette, LV disc)

28

## THE SEARCHERS (1956)

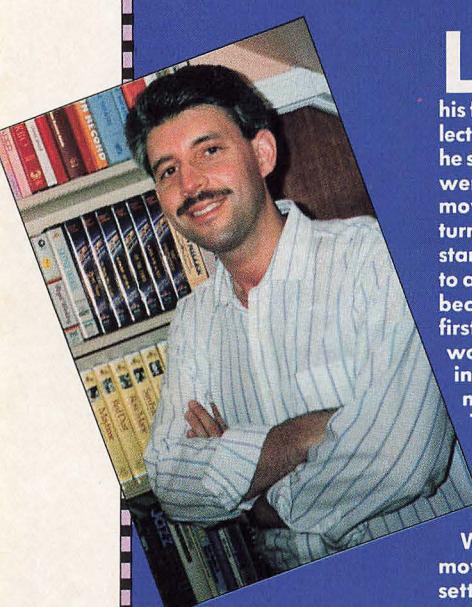
John Ford's most beautiful western, and that's saying a lot. The elegance of simplicity is summed up in its final shot, with John Wayne framed in a doorway (one picture that's worth a thousand words). (Warner cassette, LV disc)

29

## SOME LIKE IT HOT (1959)

One of the all-time great comedies, with that sharp Billy Wilder edge, plus great performances from Jack Lemmon, Tony Curtis and Marilyn Monroe. It's easy to forget just how funny this

## DAVID WEINER'S MUSICAL MANIA



Long Island, New York, video buff David Weiner started collecting cassettes of movie musicals even before he owned his first VCR. "Back in the '70s, I was into collecting records, principally by the big bands," he says. "Since a lot of what the bands played were movie songs, I would watch for those movies on TV or go see them whenever they turned up at revival houses. Then, when they started coming out on home video, the chance to actually own a copy of the ones I liked best became a knockout kind of thing for me. At first, I wasn't sure how long certain titles would be available, so I started buying them in the early '80s—to make sure I wouldn't miss out on them after I could afford a VCR. The first title I bought was the 1930 *King of Jazz*, and then such favorites of mine as *The Pirate*, *Bells Are Ringing*, *Cabin in the Sky*, *West Side Story* and all the Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers musicals.

Weiner estimates he now has about 250 movie musicals in his collection—all on cassette. He also collects sci-fi movies, but musicals are his main love. And, in general, he prefers the quality of a prerecorded cassette over what he could get taping the same movie

from TV. "You can't beat the sharpness and cleanliness of the copies I've bought of *The Court Jester*, *Rosalie*, *Kid Millions* and *Whoopee*," he says. "There are exceptions, of course, particularly where Macrovision is used."

Weiner also feels that MGM/UA deserves special praise for releasing its musicals on a regular basis, while the great musicals of other companies languish in the vaults. "As a big band fan," he says, "I keep waiting for CBS/Fox to release the two Glenn Miller movies they have, *Sun Valley Serenade* and *Orchestra Wives*. You can still buy Miller's recordings in the stores—but where are the videos?"

Between his extensive record collection and his ever-expanding videocassette collection, Weiner says that one of the rooms of his home has become, in effect, a media library. His videocassettes already fill two bookcases and it won't be long, he says, before he needs a third. Weiner adds that part of the fun of owning a specific collection is being able to share viewing with friends. "Just last week," he says, "I had some friends in to watch the restored version of *A Star Is Born*—in stereo, now that I have a stereo VCR."

—Roy Hemming

movie is—until you watch it again. (MGM/UA cassette, LV disc)

30

### BRIEF ENCOUNTER (1945)

Adult romance, as no one else has ever dared to show it. Noel Coward's script, David Lean's direction, and the understated appeal of Celia Johnson and Trevor Howard turn this simple story into something special—with Rachmaninoff's music as the icing on the cake. (Paramount cassette)



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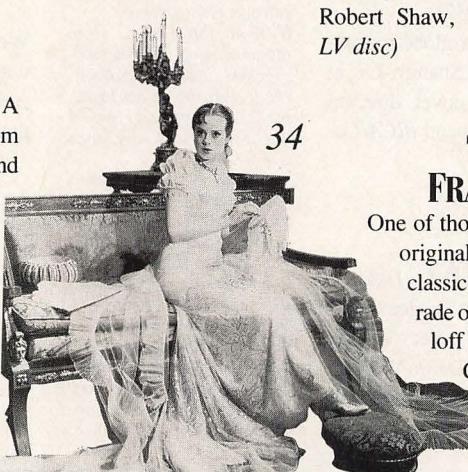
### HIS GIRL FRIDAY (1940)

The ultimate fast-talking, hard-boiled comedy. A remake of *The Front Page*, it goes full-throttle from start to finish, with Cary Grant, Rosalind Russell and a superb collection of character actors under the direction of Howard Hawks. (Prism, Video Yesteryear, KVC, Discount and United cassettes)

32

### THE GRADUATE (1967)

Many of the '60s' most topical movies have become quaint (or unwatchable) period pieces,



34

33

### JAWS (1975)

When does bubble-gum entertainment become great moviemaking? When a talent like Steven Spielberg and a host of creative collaborators get to work on a juicy adventure yarn like this. Even after repeated viewings, it never loses its bite. With Roy Scheider, Robert Shaw, Richard Dreyfuss. (MCA cassette, LV disc)

34

### THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN (1935)

One of those rare times when a sequel tops the original. James Whale's follow-up to his 1931 classic *Frankenstein* is a gem, with a parade of memorable moments—and Boris Karloff at his best. With Elsa Lanchester, Colin Clive, Valerie Hobson, Ernest Thesiger, Dwight Frye. (MCA cassette, LV disc)

## CHARLENE LOWDER'S FAMILY AFFAIR

**N**ot all video collectors have been at it for a long time. Charlene Lowder started less than two years ago, but she now has around 300 videocassettes. In fact, her collection is growing so fast that she and her husband, James, are in the process of redesigning one of the rooms of their home in Dover, New Jersey, to accommodate new shelving to replace the drawers and old file cabinet where they now store all their tapes.

"I've been a movie fan all my life," says Lowder, who works as a data entry coordinator for an elevator company. "But it got just too expensive for our family to go out to the movies as often as we'd like—and my husband also got sick of sitting on bubble gum all the time. So, we decided to look into a VCR.

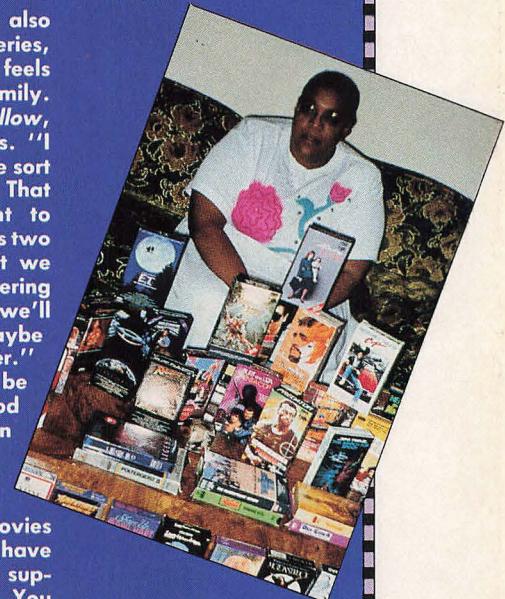
"At first we just rented movies, but as the prices for tapes came down, we started buying more and more. I began with some of the Disney titles I'd seen when I was growing up, so that I could enjoy them again with my own children."

Lowder now collects action-adventure movies for her husband, mostly comedies for herself, and series such as *Faerie Tale Theatre*

for her daughter, Shari. Lowder has also started collecting some documentary series, such as *The Kennedy Years*, which she feels are important educational tools for a family.

"My own favorites are movies like *Willow*, *E.T.* and *The Color Purple*," she says. "I feel these are going to be classics of the sort you never get tired of watching." That aspect—rewatchability—is important to Lowder: "We watch most of our movies two or three times within the month that we get them, because you keep discovering new things with each viewing. Then we'll put them aside for a while and maybe go back to certain titles a few months later." Lowder feels that a good movie can be watched over and over, just as a good piece of music can be listened to again and again.

She also believes in viewing her collection as comfortably as possible. "We like to watch most of our movies in bed," she says, "especially since we have a bed that goes up and down and supports your back while you're watching. You can't watch that comfortably in a movie theater!"



—R.H.

35

## THE ADVENTURES OF ROBIN HOOD (1938)

The swashbuckler of choice for most movie buffs—and the class act of its genre. Errol Flynn, Olivia de Havilland, Basil Rathbone and Claude Rains head the cast, Erich Wolfgang Korngold provides the music and Technicolor paints the images in vivid hues. (MGM/UA cassette; Pioneer LV disc)

36

## LOST HORIZON (1937)

Ronald Colman is perfectly cast as a globe-trotting adventurer whose destiny leads him to Shangri-La, in this vivid adaptation of James Hilton's novel, directed by Frank Capra. Talk about wish fulfillment! (RCA/Columbia cassette, LV disc)

37

## TERMS OF ENDEARMENT (1984)

A movie that wears its heart on its sleeve and earns its tears honestly, with a gallery of fine characterizations by Shirley MacLaine, Debra Winger, Jeff Daniels and Jack Nicholson. Tearjerkers should all be this good. (Paramount cassette, LV disc)

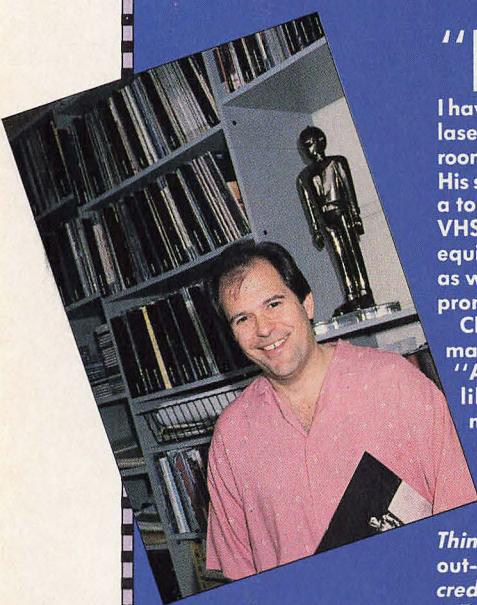


## THE 10 COMMANDMENTS OF TAPE AND DISC PRESERVATION

A video collection is only as good as the condition of the tapes and discs in it. Following these 10 tips—suggested by Fuji, Maxell and 3M—should help keep your tapes and discs in tip-top shape.

1. Store tapes and discs in their boxes and sleeves.
2. Store tapes and discs upright. Position tapes vertically with the full hub below the empty hub.
3. Keep them dry. Mildew and condensation can build up on dormant tapes.
4. Avoid storage in extreme heat or cold. Purists insist on a strict 70°, 50% humidity storage environment.
5. Keep tapes away from magnetic fields (TV sets, loudspeakers, electric motors). Magnetism may erase tapes.
6. Fast-forward and rewind your tapes all the way, once every six months.
7. Label all of your tapes and make sure the protection tab is broken to prevent accidentally erasing a program you want to save.
8. Never leave tapes in your VCR; they may stretch.
9. Never touch the tape or disc surface. Fingerprints and skin oils can cause damage.
10. Keep your machine clean. Routine maintenance will ensure optimum performance.

## FRED CHRISS' CORNUCOPIA



"I'm a video maniac—no doubt about it—and have been since the late '70s," says Fred Chriss of Los Angeles. "I guess I have about 1,000 Beta tapes and about 700 laser discs. And I designed my own media room long before people were calling it that." His setup includes a 32-inch monitor/receiver, a top-of-the-line laser disc player, Beta and VHS VCRs, and lots of audio/video switching equipment. He used to have a projection TV as well, but, he says, "I got sick of the compromised quality, so I got rid of it."

Chriss' collection runs the gamut from Ingmar Bergman dramas to what he calls "American junk movies—you know, things like *The Towering Inferno*, disaster movies." He especially likes sci-fi movies, and his favorites in that category—all in their laser disc editions—include *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *This Island Earth*, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and *The Thing*. He is also the proud owner of a long-out-of-print *DiscoVision* laser disc of *The Incredible Shrinking Man*.

Five years ago, Chriss became so immersed in the world of video that he opened his own video store, Video Active, in

L.A. He feels that having been a collector himself for so many years gives him an edge in understanding customers' needs. His biggest gripe about the industry today is the inconsistency in the quality of source materials that companies use for both cassettes and discs, plus the poor panning and scanning of widescreen movies for video release, in addition to skimping in other areas.

"For example," he says, "I just got a disc of *All About Eve* that I've been waiting for years to be released, and there's so much racket in the audio channel that you can't hear all the dialogue! And a disc of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* that I also waited and waited for has compromised visuals. What bugs me is that some companies just don't seem willing to spend a dime beyond the absolute minimum to get their releases out, while others pull out all the stops to give the public the very best, such as the *Star Wars* release. That's why I think it's important that anyone starting a video collection seek out a store that's run by someone who really knows the inventory and can steer you right on which versions are the ones to have."

—R.H.

38

## DR. STRANGELOVE

Or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb (1964)



Black comedy at its most pungent, under the direction of Stanley Kubrick. The insanity of war and of war gamesmanship are richly depicted by Peter Sellers (in three separate roles), George C. Scott and a handpicked cast. (RCA/Columbia cassette, LV disc)

39

## ANNIE HALL (1977)

Woody Allen reached his first plateau as filmmaker with this beautifully realized comedy, the first in his career to depend on something more than jokes (though the jokes are great). (MGM/UA cassette, LV disc)

40

## MOONSTRUCK (1987)

Just when you thought charm and characterization were gone from moviemaking, along comes this wonderful ethnic comedy. Bravo to director Norman Jewison and author John Patrick Shanley—not to mention Cher and a colorful cast. *A la famiglia!* (MGM/UA cassette; Pioneer LV disc)

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*Tiny TV/VCR combos are here.*

# Laptop Video

BY FRANK VIZARD



**P**icture yourself in a boat on a river, on a fast-moving plane, train or automobile. You've settled in for the ride, ready to relax. You dip into your bag for that little something you've been saving for a long trip. No, it's not *Bonfire of the Vanities*, though it is about the size of a hardcover book. The flick of a switch fires up a screen. You slip a videotape in, kick back and enjoy the show. That's getting "personal," in the video sense.

Personal video is an idea familiar to anyone who's ever brought a portable or pocket television to a ballpark or picnic. But recently, the concept has expanded to include videotape playback. The call for a portable VCR small enough to take on trips is obvious. While you can whip out a pocket TV on any air, land or sea journey, television reception is frequently poor or even non-existent during such passages. In an age in which time is becoming an even more precious commodity, the chance to view tapes of your favorite program—or even a work-related video memo—represents productive use of time that's often otherwise squandered.

When somebody plunks one of these little devices down on your lap with *Die Hard* playing on the screen, it's hard not to be impressed. But a lot of people wonder whether the personal, or laptop, video revolution will catch fire the way VCRs, camcorders and the Walkman did before it.

Many manufacturers, for instance, have rushed out laptop video prototypes in a dazzling display of space-saving design technology. Consumers, however, are again being asked to endure the confusing format battles that plagued the early VCR and—more recently—camcorder markets. In addition to that unappealing prospect, the message from many manufacturers who've

# But are movies ready for the road?



The personal video array:  
(clockwise, from top right)  
Sharp's VC-V540U, Panasonic's  
AV Pocket Watch prototype,  
Sony's GV-8 Video Walkman,  
Casio's VF-3000.

# Laptop Video

unveiled intriguing laptop prototypes seems to be: "Look, but don't buy." In many cases, they haven't said when—or even if—they will offer the new models for sale.

**I**f it weren't for Sony and the 8mm format, we probably wouldn't even be asking these questions. Portable TV/VCR combinations—long a staple of corporate presentations—are nothing new. But by following some of the design trails they blazed with their Walkman and Discman products, Sony engineers were able to shrink the TV/VCR combo into a package that's easy to carry around. The potential of the 8mm system, with its small cassettes and playback mechanism, provided Sony with the opportunity to add *video* to its popular audio Walkman concept.

The result of the company's laptop video experiments was the introduction last year of the GV-8 Video Walkman, which houses a VCR and a three-inch, color liquid crystal display (LCD) television screen in a package measuring about  $2\frac{1}{2} \times 5 \times 8$  (HxWxD, in inches) and weighing just  $2\frac{1}{2}$  pounds. It offers up to four hours of playing time in the extended-play (EP) mode or two hours in standard play (SP) with a P6-120 8mm cassette.

The GV-8 lists for about \$1,300, a price at which Sony manages to include most of the features you'd find on a basic full-size VCR. The GV-8 can record VHF and UHF broadcasts or time-shift them with its one-day/one-event timer. Its high-speed picture search allows you to quickly scan through any recording.

The TV portion of the GV-8 incorporates an active matrix system that offers improved sharpness, contrast and color purity over previous passive LCD screens. It's also backlit to keep the image from becoming washed out in bright sunlight, a common problem with LCD screens. For outdoor convenience, the GV-8 operates on either a rechargeable nickel-cadmium battery or standard alkaline batteries. Battery life is about one hour in the VCR mode, while TV-only play uses less power. Sony recently took the wraps off a nearly identical model, the GV-9, with a larger four-inch screen.

Though it hasn't announced plans for an introduction yet, Fisher has displayed a prototype TV/VCR much like Sony's GV-8. The Fisher 8mm machine offers a slightly larger  $3\frac{1}{2}$ -inch LCD screen.

While Sony took the lead in bringing personal video to market, the VHS camp will not likely concede the category. Full-size VHS cassettes, which are necessary to compete with 8mm's two- to four-hour playback capability, make for a far bulkier package. So, engineers had the deck stacked against them when they began reducing the size of VHS machines.

Just how small the VHS camp could make a TV/VCR combination is evident with Casio's VF-3000 (\$1,399), which measures  $8 \times 6 \times 3$  and weighs about five pounds. The video head drum used in the VF-3000 is smaller than that used in a full-size VCR. And while the tape is wound three-quarters of the way around the drum within the VF-3000, a regular VCR operates with the tape wound about halfway around the tape drum. This means that the amount of videotape coming into contact with the VF-3000's tape heads is the same as it would be in larger VCRs.

The 8mm vs. VHS laptop challenge has led to some other handy miniaturization and hefty pricing. Sharp, for example, offers its vision of personal video, the VC-V540U, a VHS TV/VCR combo, for a list price

of \$1,900. The VC-V540U, however, is the size of half a briefcase, measuring around  $12 \times 10 \times 5$  and weighing 12 pounds. Its active matrix LCD screen measures four inches diagonally, and power is supplied by either AC, DC, a car battery or rechargeable batteries.

Even with its high price and large size, the VC-V540U comes up a little short. There's no built-in TV tuner to receive broadcasts, though there are audio/video input jacks for connection to a tuner (a rather whimsical attribute since odds are if you're near a separate tuner, you're probably also near a normal-size TV screen). The VC-V540U could be used, however, as a portable recorder of TV broadcasts. Instead of aiming for couch potatoes on the run, in the company's marketing strategy, Sharp plans to emphasize the VC-V540U's benefits as a tool for busy executives to fire off audio/video memos.

Hitachi plans to go the laptop video route *sans* TV tuner as well. Due in September, the company's VT-LC50U (\$1,699) offers VHS

Hi-Fi sound through headphones as well as monaural playback through a built-in external speaker. The LCD screen is a whopping (by laptop standards) five inches. The  $7\frac{1}{10}$ -pounder measures roughly  $15 \times 9 \times 3\frac{1}{2}$  and features automatic rewind, rewind shut-off, bi-directional visual search, freeze-frame and on-screen display of the various functions and battery level. Power is available either from a rechargeable battery or from AC or DC sources.



**High concept: JVC's Concept C prototype includes a detachable camera and LCD screen.**

ing the omission, a spokesperson from Sharp also noted the typically poor television reception encountered on the road.

At first glance, and ignoring questions of software availability, it would appear that 8mm has a bit of a jump on VHS, both in price and portability. "We're not ready to abdicate the market to 8mm," says Stan Hametz, vice president and general manager of Panasonic's consumer video division. "We believe there's a pretty good chance of a real personal video market." And that's where the VHS camp's compact competitor may come in.

While VHS equipment makers are cur-

*Continued on page 85*

**One for the road: Hitachi's VT-LC50U VHS Hi-Fi laptop.**



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# UP NEXT

An up-close look at the  
coolest gear for fall—and beyond

**I**t was a show of yesterday and tomorrow," quipped industry analyst Robert Gerson of the recent Consumer Electronics Show (CES) held in Chicago. The annual trade event drew an estimated 57,000 people for four days in June to see the latest in electronics. But, as Gerson noted, this CES was dominated by fairly familiar products and technologies on one hand, and on the other, stunning prototypes that may not reach store shelves for years.

Among the attention-getting prototypes were JVC's Concept C personal video system (the tiniest TV/VCR combo yet), Panasonic's beam-index, flat-tube TV set and Toshiba's still-video camera, which can record images on a solid-state card.

That's not to say there weren't some eye-opening here-and-now products. The VCR field showed a continuing trend toward near-professional capabilities in home editing (most impressive: Panasonic's PV-535). In televisions, screen sizes keep creeping up;

Mitsubishi showed a 70-inch projection set. And improved definition—or IDTV—technology continues to spread.

Longtime video industry observers got a sense of déjà vu watching the crowds jam Nintendo's enormous booth and seeing the arrival of new incompatible game systems including NEC's TurboGrafx-16 and Sega's Genesis. Another blast from the past was the resurgence of the format battle pitting VHS backer JVC against 8mm supporter Sony. At least four companies showed new VHS VCRs able to accept VHS-C cassettes without an adapter, and VHS-C personal video TV/VCR prototypes were much in evidence. Sony fired back with an impressive new advance in 8mm miniaturization, its latest version of the classic Handycam.

*VR* editors James B. Meigs, Gregory P. Fagan and Glenn Kenny and contributors Ron Goldberg and Marc Wielage tweaked knobs, pawed prototypes and pestered manufacturers both on and off the show floor in order to assemble this special preview.

## SONY'S CCD-TR5 HANDYCAM ▶

While even three- and four-pound camcorders have dimensions that inhibit using them as everyday items, Sony's new 8mm CCD-TR5, which is less than five inches high and wide and about seven inches long, can be carried in a coat pocket or purse. Without battery and tape, the model weighs in at a mere 1 1/4 pounds.

More amazing than its dimensions is the number of features the CCD-TR5 packs into such a small package: full auto focus and auto white balance, variable speed electronic shutter, one-page digital superimposer and even an insert edit feature.

The real importance of the FL breakthrough becomes more obvious as you handle the camcorder. The whole thing fits comfortably in your palm and is easier to handle than most 35mm still cameras. The single, switchable A/V input/output terminal combined with a full-featured VCR section enhances the model's convenience even more. Arriving in August at a list price of \$1,500, the CCD-TR5 ought to add still more fire to the 8mm vs. VHS-C battle. (G.K.)





### TOSHIBA'S IC CARD ▲ STILL-VIDEO SYSTEM

Although many pundits are skeptical as to whether still video will catch on with consumers, the

Toshiba IC card system was one item on the CES floor that captured everyone's imagination.

The high quality of the video stills (a full 400 lines of resolution

and superb color quality) was impressive. But even more impressive was the way the IC card system stores picture information. While all other video formats record on magnetic media (tape, or in the case of other still-video cameras, a mini floppy disc), the Toshiba system stores pictures digitally on a 20-megabit IC card that's a little larger than a credit card. This makes the IC card system a truly solid-state video recorder.

The card itself stores 13 full-frame still-video images. The camera portion incorporates a 400,000-pixel CCD image sensor. There's also a portable playback system that displays images on a

four-inch LCD screen. Toshiba engineers have also developed an "electronic photo album" that stores up to 1,600 still-video images on a single digital audiotape (DAT) cassette. The playback device has a random access function that lets the user punch up any still by number. Since the image is transferred from one digital storage medium to another, there's absolutely no signal degradation in the transfer of card images to the DAT cassette.

The whole IC system is still in the prototype stage and probably won't reach consumers for a year at least. Consequently, pricing was not discussed. (G.K.)

### PANASONIC'S DUAL CAMERA PV-535 ▶

By far the most exciting effects-oriented camcorder to debut at CES, Panasonic's PV-535 offers a virtually unprecedented array of pro-style image-manipulating options.

The key to the PV-535's appeal is that it is two cameras in one. The main camera is, of course, part of the camcorder body; the second is a tiny camera that mounts on the shoe horn attachment on top of the camcorder and hooks up via a multipin attachment.

Video from the second camera can be mixed into the main picture in a number of ways: as an inset shot in any quadrant of the picture, as a dissolve, and most impressively, as a superimposition by means of chroma key. To achieve this last

effect, the subject of the main camcorder shot stands in front of a blue or green backdrop, and the image from the second camera replaces that background.

The demonstration of this feature had the second camera picking up a photo of President Bush, so visitors at the booth could get a printed video still of themselves standing with the president. But any videophile worth his salt knows that there are much more creative uses for this feature. We only wish that the camcorder accepted a direct video input for chroma key as well as the multipin camera connector. As it is, chroma-key mixing on this model can only be done with two live sources.

This full-size VHS model also boasts a flying erase head and synchro-edit capabilities. It will be



available in September at a suggested retail price of \$1,700. The less elaborate PV-530, featuring

digital freeze-frame and quadrant effects but no chroma key, is already available for \$1,650. (G.K.)

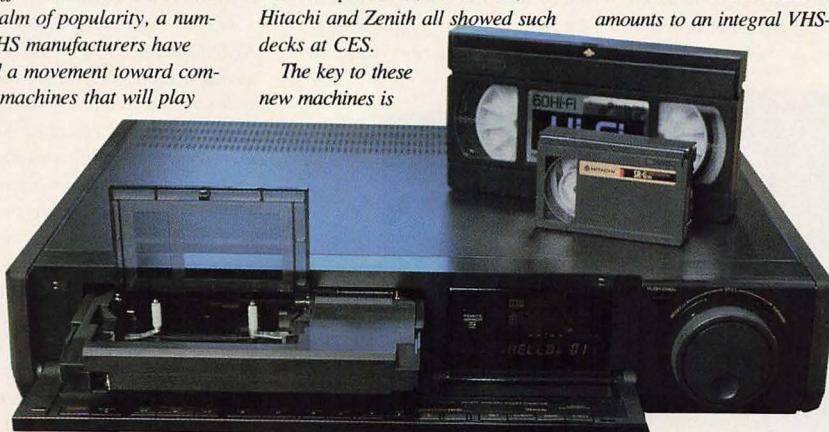
### HITACHI'S VHS/VHS-C COMPATIBLE DECK ▼

In an effort to move VHS-C into a new realm of popularity, a number of VHS manufacturers have launched a movement toward combination machines that will play

both formats without the cassette adapter originally required for VHS-C tapes. JVC, Panasonic, Hitachi and Zenith all showed such decks at CES.

The key to these new machines is

a dual-loading system that allows for VHS-C compatibility. The Hitachi deck contains what amounts to an integral VHS-C



adapter in the main transport drawer.

Since VHS-C uses a much thinner tape stock than conventional VHS, special attention has been paid to the transport mechanisms of these machines. A variable tension transport automatically adjusts to the appropriate tape size, and adaptive torque motors precisely control tape winding and feeding.

In a further effort to coddle these thin tape stocks, the Panasonic decks use a "half-load" mode for fast-wind operations. This not only ensures that tape-to-head contact is kept to a minimum (thus saving wear on both tape and heads), but dramatically improves rewind and fast-forward times. (R.G.)

## AND ON THE OTHER HAND...

While the Consumer Electronics Show is a great place to see engineering brilliance at its best, it also plays host to some of the screwiest products and looniest marketing terminology ever conceived by the human mind. Here are a few of our faves:

• **The Most Shameless Rip-off of a Buzzword Award** goes to O'Ryan Industries of Vancouver, Washington, who proudly displayed their "HDTV" television projector (right next to their illuminated shower heads). The projector is actually good old NTSC with a digital line doubler to increase apparent resolution. It doesn't look bad, but high-def it ain't.

• **The Wackiest Pseudo-Technical Jargon Award** goes to the normally more restrained Sony. Its new MP (metal particle) 8mm videotape boasts a new particle called "Cosmocite," while the ME (metal evaporated) tape features the "Evaticle" magnetic crystal. (Maybe next year they'll hire Linda Evans as a spokesperson and just call it "Crystalite.")

• **The Strangest Audio Fashion Accessory Award** goes to Burlingame, California's Serious Listening for a device the company says will "improve the focus of the stereo image and improve dynamic contrast." The gadget? A pair of leather ear cups that work about as well as cupping your hands behind your ears, but make the wearer look a bit like a desert rat on steroids.

• **The Worst Electronics Product of the Show Award** is no contest: Express Yourself Inc. (from Charlotte, North Carolina) wins hands down for the Talking Tissue electronic toilet paper dispenser. Give a spin to the roll, and a prerecorded voice comes out to embarrass the, uh, captive audience with such clever bons mots as, "Nice one," and, "Stinky, stinky." They're still working the bugs out; when we saw it demonstrated, the dispenser got stuck and the last words we heard drifting across the show floor were, "Stinky, stinky, stinky, stinky...." (M.W.)

## UP NEXT



### SHARP'S LCD PROJECTION TV ▼

Advances in liquid crystal display (LCD) technology have long been a fixture at CES, and this year several companies showed projection TVs incorporating LCD technology. Most notably, Sharp unveiled the XV-100 system, a single beam unit.

Similar in design to a slide projector, the XV-100 shines a beam of light through a trio of three-inch LCD panels and focuses the combined image on the screen. The user can vary the image size from 40 inches up to 100 inches. The projector itself weighs a mere 30 pounds.

Picture quality on the XV-100 was exceptionally bright and well-defined, with horizontal resolution of over 300 lines, though a slight graininess was visible. S-video terminals are included, and

Sharp's newly developed lamp technology claims brightness three to four times better than standard halogen lamps.

Not to be outdone, several other companies showed their own LCD projection units. Toshiba had a 78-inch screen with 350 lines of horizontal resolution. Panasonic countered with a 40-inch rear-projection IDTV unit with enough enhancement circuitry to boast a 100:1 contrast ratio. (R.G.)



### SONY'S 43-INCH DIRECT-VIEW TV ▼

The new 43-inch, direct-view Sony monitor with improved-definition (IDTV) circuitry is, subjectively speaking, one of the best-looking big-screen sets we've seen. And at nearly \$1,000 an inch (\$40,000), it's roughly 10 times the cost per inch of any other consumer monitor. But, as a limited-edition

model for Trinitron's 20th anniversary, the PVM-4300 is designed more as a statement than a conventional product.

Sony's IDTV technology, which uses digital memory to double the number of scan lines constituting the picture, made its debut with the 27-inch KV-27FX10 (tested in the Jan. '89 VR). A close look at the enormous picture revealed the



### VIDEONICS' PRO-ED EDITING CONTROLLER

Desktop video editing took a giant step forward with the introduction of the Videonics Pro-ED, a modular post-production system geared toward professional, industrial and business users.

The Pro-ED combines the functions of an editor, special-effects/graphics generator and titler in one compact unit. When combined with two editing VCRs, a camcorder and a monitor, the Pro-ED becomes the centerpiece of a sophisticated and surprisingly flexible editing system.

Using a keyboard and a mouse, the Pro-ED includes a librarian feature that retains the in and out points of literally hundreds of cuts. Scenes can be marked in the freeze-frame mode or on the fly, and built-in communication ports allow hookup to a computer printer. On-screen help menus guide novices through the editing process, and what's more, final assemble edits are generated directly from the original source tapes, which saves a generation of picture quality.

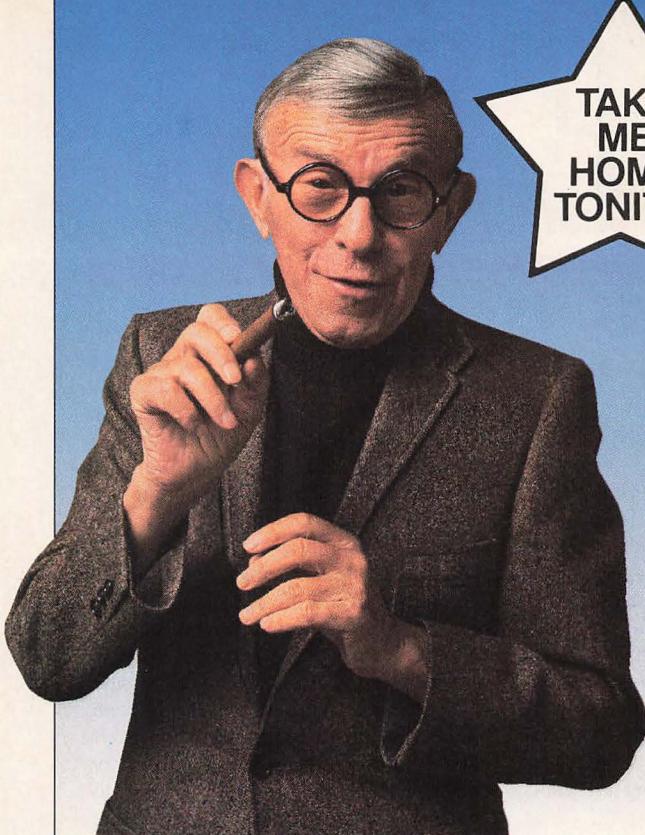
Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the Pro-ED is its software-based operating system. The on-screen windows, icons and the mouse suggest an Apple Macintosh, but frequently used commands can be combined in keystroke-saving macros, just like a DOS-based computer.

The Pro-ED should be available by fall for under \$1,500. (R.G.)

strengths as well as weaknesses of current IDTV. While the picture was sharp and dense, without any visible scan lines, curved edges revealed a slight saw-tooth effect. And, in scenes with movement, we detected a slight lag or blurring. The set viewed was a prototype, and further refinements are expected.

In other big-screen developments, NEC displayed its 52-inch IDTV model, a strikingly clear set with a split-screen digital on/off setting.

The pictures on Hitachi's 46- and 50-inch UltraVision models revealed that the company has made impressive gains in picture sharpness and color. Mitsubishi, meanwhile, introduced a 70-inch set with a surprisingly bright picture. The unveiling coincided with the final Detroit Pistons-Chicago Bulls playoff game, which made the huge screen's virtues richly apparent to appreciative viewers. (G.P.F.)



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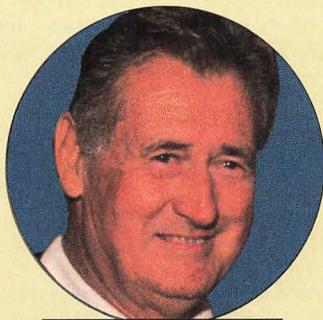
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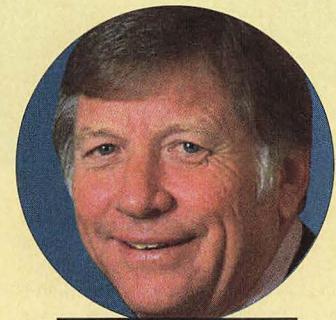
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# •REVIEWS•

## LATEST MOVIES

### MISSISSIPPI BURNING ★★★

Gene Hackman, Willem Dafoe, Frances McDormand. Directed by Alan Parker. 1988. Rated R. (Orion cassette, 127 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.98) □

BY NEAL GABLE

First came the hosannas. Hollywood had finally tackled the gruesome subject of Southern redneck violence against

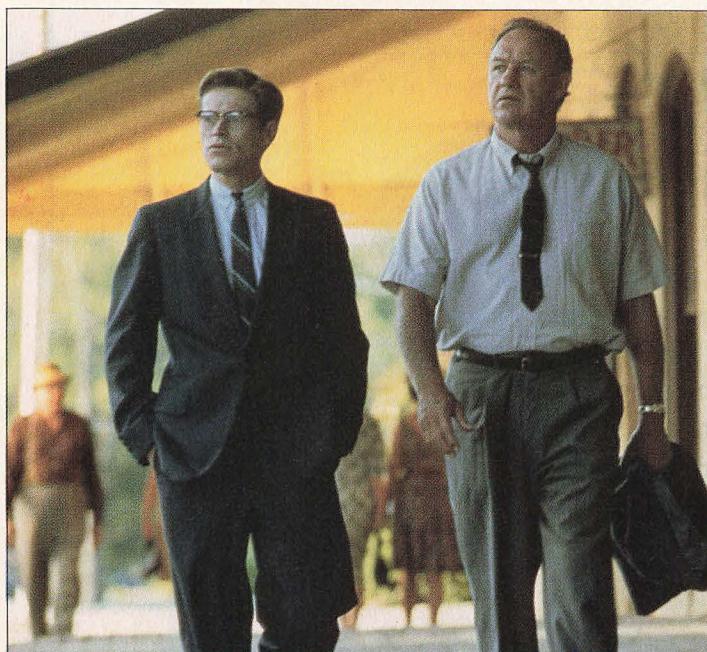
Former *Sneak Previews* co-host Neal Gabler is the author of *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood*.

blacks. It had finally dramatized an ugly episode in America's recent history—specifically 1964, when three young civil rights workers (two whites from New York and one black) were brutally slain by law enforcement officers in cahoots with the Klan. Hollywood also had finally dared to disinter the shameful past and dangle it in front of a South that was still prickly—and understandably so.

Then came the reconsideration—not from the rednecks but from another, more surprising quarter. Yes, in *Mississippi Burning* Hollywood had, at long last, con-

fronted racial violence. *But*, said a rising chorus of *black* critics, it was a falsification and simplification—false because blacks were not the passive victims the movie portrayed them as, and simplistic because the FBI didn't come South in '64 with a cavalry-call righting of the wrongs. In fact, protested some critics, *Mississippi Burning* was another white job on blacks. The heroes of the picture should be the brave blacks who actually resisted and persisted; instead, the heroes were presented as two FBI agents (Dafoe and Hackman) who hunt the perpetrators and punish them. Director Parker himself even fueled the chorus when he grumpily conceded that he had been forced to "Hollywoodize" the story by converting it into a detective story. Wasn't that just like white folks?

Whether *Mississippi Burning* is a civil rights tale packaged as a detective story or, as I think, a detective story packaged as a civil rights tale, both its supporters and its detractors are partly right. Parker (the British director of *Fame*, *Shoot the Moon* and more recently *Angel Heart*) is a visual virtuoso whose pictures usually are better scene by scene than taken whole. So it's not surprising that *Mississippi Burning* is piecemeal effective, with beautifully crafted vignettes of violence that are guaranteed to arouse rage. Parker has got the texture of the period and place down: the casual horror, the fear, the terror. "I want you to be angry," shouts a black preacher at the young black civil rights worker's funeral. *Mississippi Burning* accomplishes that.



Burning sensations  
Dafoe and Hackman as  
FBI heroes:  
Gripping drama, but  
historically  
revisionist?

When Gene Hackman won the Best Actor Oscar in 1971 for his gritty portrait of real-life New York narcotics cop "Popeye" Doyle in *The French Connection*, he solidified a new era of the character actor as movie star. Though Hackman had two previous supporting actor nominations (*Bonnie and Clyde*, *I Never Sang for My Father*), the ex-Marine joined his former roommates Dustin Hoffman and Robert Duvall in proving to Hollywood executives that audiences were interested in the work of actors whose looks mirrored the average joe. In the past year, his work as an unconventional FBI agent in *Mississippi Burning* won him another

Oscar nomination. Craig Modderman spoke with the press-shy actor for *VR*.

**VR:** *What kind of an image do you feel you have in Hollywood and with moviegoers?*

**HACKMAN:** The general public sees me either as a beer-drinking buddy or the relative they're not sure they really want to talk to. [Laughs] I seem to inspire a lot of trust in people or suspicion. The response usually depends on what pictures I have out at the time. When *No Way Out* was playing in theaters, I got a lot of "he's-got-a-real-sneaky-look-doesn't-he" stares. When *Hoosiers* was playing, I was the kind and honest Midwesterner that people

wanted to take home for supper.

**VR:** *What generally determines your choice of a role?*

**HACKMAN:** A lot has to do with the director and whether or not I've played that kind of character before. *Mississippi Burning* was interesting because the director, Alan Parker, is foreign and very visual. Also I liked the fact that the movie blended fact and fiction and was a period of American history that a lot of people aren't aware of. I made *Superman* because I wanted to do a comedy and play a hammy kind of villain. That was fun. I did *Bat 21* and *Full Moon in Blue Water* because they were offbeat

## HACKMAN: UNAVERAGE

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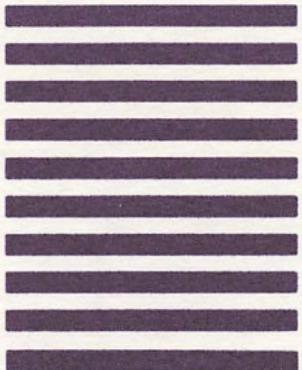
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On the other hand, by distorting the facts and forcing them into a traditional narrative framework, *Mississippi Burning* also sacrifices irony and complexity. Nothing is made, for example, of the unlikelihood that the FBI, under that political Neanderthal J. Edgar Hoover, was investigating men with whom it was in sympathy. And in concocting a subsidiary conflict between a Northern college-educated agent (Dafoe) and a Southern good ol' boy agent (Hackman), the picture turns strained and strident. Their ongoing argument about proper procedure seems irrelevant, the focus on them misplaced.

Dafoe's role is thankless: FBI agent as straight arrow. But just as Hackman's Rupert Anderson is the moral conscience of the picture, his performance is its soul. Softly recounting how his daddy once killed the mule of a black neighbor to assert his superiority, or intimidating the redneck intimidators with a combination of steel and wryness, Hackman is brilliant. Not even his Anderson, who was once a small-town Mississippi sheriff himself, can fully comprehend the magnitude of hate that blazes in *Mississippi Burning*. Neither can we. But distortions, simplifications and all, this movie is likely to scorch you even if it never brings you to any deeper understanding or more profound emotion.

■

## THE ACCIDENTAL TOURIST ★★★★

William Hurt, Kathleen Turner, Geena Davis. Directed by Lawrence Kasdan. 1988. Rated PG. (Warner cassette, 121 min., Hi-Fi stereo, DS, \$89.95; LV disc, CX stereo, \$29.98)

BY ANDREW SARRIS

*The Accidental Tourist* won four Oscar nominations and received the top 1988 award from the New York Film Critics Circle. Geena Davis garnered an eminently well-deserved Oscar for Best Supporting Actress and, if there had been any



Hurt, Oscar-winner Davis and friend: a not-so-Accidental awakening.

justice, Bud, the bite-prone Welsh corgi who figures so prominently in the movie as an emotional catalyst, would have been honored as Performing Dog of the Year. Which may be another way of saying that, although *The Accidental Tourist* may not be everyone's cup of tea, it strikes this reviewer and some others as a breath of clean, fresh air amid the smoke and sleaze of so much contemporary moviemaking.

Despite the fact that there are no killings or car chases, no knee-slapping belly laughs, no kiddie-oriented anal humor and not even any faddish four-letter words, this restrained and reflective movie did not do badly at the boxoffice and may well find its ultimate audience in the more patient precincts of videoland.

The movie is not as funny as the Anne Tyler book on which it is based, but writer-director Kasdan and company have fashioned, in their quietly oblique way, a deeply moving fable of spiritual awaken-

ing in and out of marriage. Hurt, Turner and, above all, Davis head an impeccable cast of vulnerable beings seeking to cope with the chaos and disorder of contemporary life with exaggerated efforts at control.

Hurt plays a writer of travel books for people who don't like to leave home. He is half-submerged as a human being until the shock of losing his son to a violent crime sets off a chain of events that leads to his final awakening. In the end, he must choose between a wife (Turner) who is submerged in a different way and a shameless hussy (Davis) who offers him a new life, fraught in equal measure with perils and opportunities. The choice is not an easy one.

In fact, nothing in the movie is easy. But there are all sorts of dividends in the surges of sentiment that pop up unexpectedly in the midst of some goofy bits of business. One minute you're smiling, the next you're close to tears.

*The Accidental Tourist*, like Bill Forsyth's *Housekeeping* a year or so ago, was poorly marketed for its theatrical release as a wacky comedy. The acting here is more subtly lifelike than that. But nuances and quicksilver changes of mood have never been high-concept commodities for the promoters of movies or videocassettes. Yet, for the truly discerning grown-up viewer, there have been few more satisfying entertainments in recent years.

## AVERAGE GUY

and presented a challenge. I did *Split Decisions* because I love boxing. My stand-in in that one is actually the trainer of middleweight champion Michael Nunn. We three would hang out together, and I'd pick their brains about boxing, so that became more fun than work.

**VR:** Are there any roles you regret turning down?  
**HACKMAN:** Everything good that somebody else had success with! [Laughs] No, I can't tell you, because I turned down some films only because I was already signed to something else. One role I really wanted was the lead in *Klute*, which Donald Sutherland got the day after I won the Oscar for *French Connection*. One that

got away was the part of Mr. Robinson in *The Graduate*. I had done a few scenes with Dustin and then got fired. That was a blow to me because Dustin and I were good friends and we really wanted to work with each other. We almost made *Scarecrow*, but things didn't work out [Al Pacino did the part]. I'd like to do a comedy with Dustin, maybe like *Ishtar*, which I enjoyed, only with a lot more laughs.

**VR:** What kinds of movies do you watch?  
**HACKMAN:** I watch people I may be working with soon. I also like watching Spencer Tracy and Humphrey Bogart movies because I can learn a lot about acting from seeing them work. I also watch Dusty and Bob's [Duvall] films, not just because they're my friends, but because they're two of the best actors we have.

Andrew Sarris is also a film critic for the New York Observer and professor of film at Columbia University. His newest book is *Cinema and Politics*.

## TRUE BELIEVER ★★★

James Woods, Robert Downey Jr., Kurtwood Smith. Directed by Joseph Ruben. 1989. Rated R. (RCA/Columbia cassette, 103 min., Hi-Fi stereo, DS, \$89.95) □

BY JIM FARBER

In *True Believer*, Woods plays a lawyer who wears a ponytail, smokes pot and yells a lot about the need to defend the indefensible. He's the kind of character who revels in being self-righteous, contrary and hopelessly out of date.

Some of the same might be said of this movie. In fact, *True Believer* probably has more in common with such crusty comedies of the '40s as *His Girl Friday* than it does with such TV and movie courtroom dramas of the '80s as *Jagged Edge*. Wesley Strick's script recalls the darkly

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throws himself into the case more out of ideological reflexiveness than anything else, but Strick and director Ruben refuse to do the logical thing and don't come down on him for it. In fact, they present his pigheadedness as charming and nearly noble, no matter how muddled it sometimes renders his ideals. With Woods' charisma to flesh out this equation, the movie really soars. It provides his most entertaining role to date, supported strongly by the always sweet Downey and the evil foil of Smith, who looks chillingly like a Watergate-era H.R. Haldeman here.

Together the players' efforts make *True Believer* into something unique for the '80s. It's the only movie I've seen in this decade to present a '60s ideologue as unrepentant, even daring to suggest that his passion today may be more relevant than our era will readily admit. ■

## DANGEROUS LIAISONS ★★★

Glenn Close, John Malkovich, Michelle Pfeiffer, Swoosie Kurtz. Directed by Stephen Frears. 1988. Rated R. (Warner cassette, 118 min., Hi-Fi stereo, DS, \$89.95; LV disc, CX stereo, \$29.98) □

BY CLIVE BARNES

Atmosphere is everything in a Stephen Frears movie—well, perhaps not *everything*, but almost. Since his first cinematic success with *My Beautiful Laundrette*, Frears seems to stress ambiance over overt drama—a technique perhaps more helpful to the private than to the public screen. Is this why I prefer *Dangerous Liaisons* on home video rather than in its theatrical presentation and believe many others will too?

With a screenplay by Christopher Hampton, based on his own stage adaptation of Choderlos de Laclos' celebrated (even notorious) epistolary novel of aristocratic France before the deluge of Revolution, the story is as intimate as Frears' treatment. This movie version thus becomes the tiny spectacle of detail that engrosses Frears—that and the infinitely small machinations of the human



Close, Malkovich test Dangerous values.

soul fueled by villainy. From the first scenes of a wicked Marquise (Close) and an equally venal Vicomte (Malkovich) being girded obscenely into battle garb for the rigors of the fashionable life of 18th-century French nobility to Frears' final image of gorgeously blood-drenched snow, we are treated to a picture-book series of vignettes—of privilege, fashion, passion and, above all, frailty and duplicity. This is an ugly if prettily painted world.

The Marquise, seeking revenge from a scornful lover who jilted her, seeks the Vicomte's aid in a battle royal in which sex is the coinage in power-play gambles. Everything works admirably, until the Vicomte shows an unforgivable weakness: He falls in love where he should only victimize.

With one exception, the performances are as exquisite as the beautifully turned mannerisms of Hampton's script and the visual stylizations of Frears' images (note especially the camerawork of Philippe Rousselot here). The grinning, lascivious hauteur of Malkovich is properly arrogant personified. Pfeiffer is a sweetly wounded little animal as the wife who sacrifices all for love, and Kurtz fusses monumentally as a virago matron. The exception, unfortunately, is Close's dull, dowdy, frizzy-haired Marquise.

What stops me from giving the movie a fourth star is some residual memory of the updated, bowdlerized, bastardized and overpraised Roger Vadim version of 1959. It wasn't that good overall, but in the performances of Jeanne Moreau and the incomparable Gerard Philipe, there was a hint of the subtle lubricity and sexual politics of an interior landscape that Frears, with all his interior decoration and style, has missed. Narrowly, I'll admit.

## ABOUT THESE REVIEWS

To parallel the viewing environment of most home viewers, VR critics normally review programs in their homes. Unless otherwise indicated: All tapes are SP; all LV discs are EP. All programs are in color unless marked B&W. □ indicates closed captions for the hearing-impaired; DS indicates Dolby Surround sound.

★★★★ OUTSTANDING  
★★★ GOOD  
★★ AVERAGE  
★ BELOW AVERAGE

Woods, Downey test some True beliefs.

anarchic wit of classic Hollywood, just as Woods' wryly comedic performance has the larger-than-life quality of another era.

As Eddie Dodd, Woods is a heroic, '60s-style, civil rights lawyer, whose need to preserve abstract principles has reduced him to becoming a defender of major drug dealers in the '80s. When a young admirer (Downey) comes to work for him, he's goaded into taking on the defense of a man who claims he's being framed for murder. The way this case unravels in the movie may be short on credibility, but it's nonetheless fun to watch.

More important is the attitude it helps reveal about Woods' character. Dodd

Jim Farber is also a critic for the New York Daily News and Rolling Stone.



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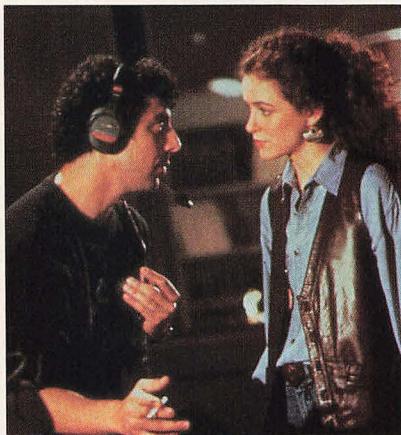


**TALK RADIO ★★★**

Eric Bogosian, Alec Baldwin, Leslie Hope, Ellen Greene. Directed by Oliver Stone. 1988. Rated R. (MCA cassette, 110 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.95)

BY ANDREW SARRIS

*Talk Radio* is a cinematic fleshing out of Eric Bogosian's theatrical tour de force, which enjoyed a moderate run at Joseph Papp's Public Theatre in New York. The movie enjoyed a modest theatrical success on the art-flick circuit, and now the video-cassette version is available for viewers



Radio daze: Bogosian blabs with Hope.

who'd like a little ideological excitement with their entertainment.

Bogosian is an unusually creative one-man-show type of performer. Your reaction to him will pretty much determine your reaction to *Talk Radio*. He is on screen almost the entire time as a post-midnight Dallas radio talk-show host who takes calls from a wide variety of loonies, many of them violently bigoted. Bogosian's character happens to be Jewish, and the Holocaust comes up more than once in the increasingly nasty exchanges.

Bogosian is glib and often funny in the angry broadcaster mode. The problem is that deep down the character *cares* for all the morons stranded out there in the electronic wasteland. And he hates himself for feeling so superior to them. Director Stone, whose liberal political biases have previously been registered in *Platoon* and *Wall Street*, has collaborated with Bogosian by giving him a portentously camera-circling *mise en scène* to suggest that a Large Statement is being made.

The women in Bogosian's life (Hope and Greene) have much more to do on the screen than they did on the stage, but only a zonked-out rock fan manages to upstage Bogosian even momentarily. For the most part, however, Bogosian roars along one on one with each member of his unseen but always clearly heard audience.

As much as Bogosian comes across as a phenomenon on the stage, his go-it-alone

instincts make him problematic as a sustained movie presence. Since he can play every part, and has done so in the past, he seems to recognize the existence of other players very grudgingly. His eyes go into a fixed orbit from time to time, as if he were wondering what all the other people are doing on the set. Nonetheless, his energy and intensity levels are prodigiously high, and if you have never seen him in action, you really should.

I don't like to give away a plot, but it should be obvious to any intelligent viewer from the very beginning that this is going to be a downer—and it is. The cassette sound quality is more than adequate for this quintessentially talky project.

**PHYSICAL EVIDENCE ★**

Burt Reynolds, Theresa Russell, Ned Beatty. Directed by Michael Crichton. 1989. Rated R. (Vestron, cassette, 100 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.98; Image LV disc, \$36.95) □

BY JEFFREY LYONS

Imagine you've come to Hollywood with a screenplay about a war hero who's now a Boston detective but who, as the movie begins, is on suspension, a suspect in a murder. Your agent would surely direct you straight to Burt Reynolds' agent. And that's what's wrong with *Physical Evidence*. It's too pat, too conventional.

Reynolds, in desperate need of a major movie hit after an astonishing number of flops for someone of his popularity, offers his familiar, somber screen persona as a good cop with a bad temper. We know from the start that he's innocent, the victim of a carefully staged frame-up.

We know the locale is Boston only because background radio broadcasts keep announcing upcoming Red Sox games. Reynolds doesn't attempt a Boston accent (a blessing, perhaps), and there's no plot reason why the setting has to be Boston. I guess New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and Miami were all booked up for other movies.

As Reynolds' court-appointed attorney, Russell strives mightily against some unbelievable character elements—playing a ritzy Peace Corps vet married to a terminally yuppie stockbroker who looks like an 8x10 glossy of himself. That their marriage is falling apart is about as surprising as the change of seasons. As she gravitates toward Reynolds you keep hoping the screenplay will come up with some fresh twists and turns. But it doesn't. At times Russell walks through scenes as if

Jeffrey Lyons is co-host of TV's *Sneak Previews* and a critic for USA Tonight and CBS Radio.

annoyed with the script—and who can blame her? She and Reynolds never really seem to click.

There's a nice supporting performance from Beatty as the district attorney who's convinced of Reynolds' guilt. But even he can't save this from being a mechanical, uninvolving courtroom drama.

**BUSTER ★★★**

Phil Collins, Julie Walters, Anthony Quayle. Directed by David Green. 1988. Rated R. (HBO cassette, 94 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.95) □

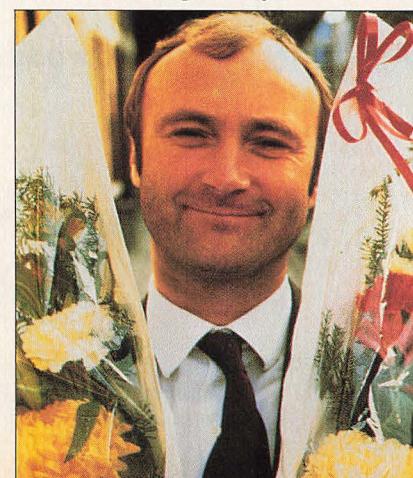
BY STEVE SIMELS

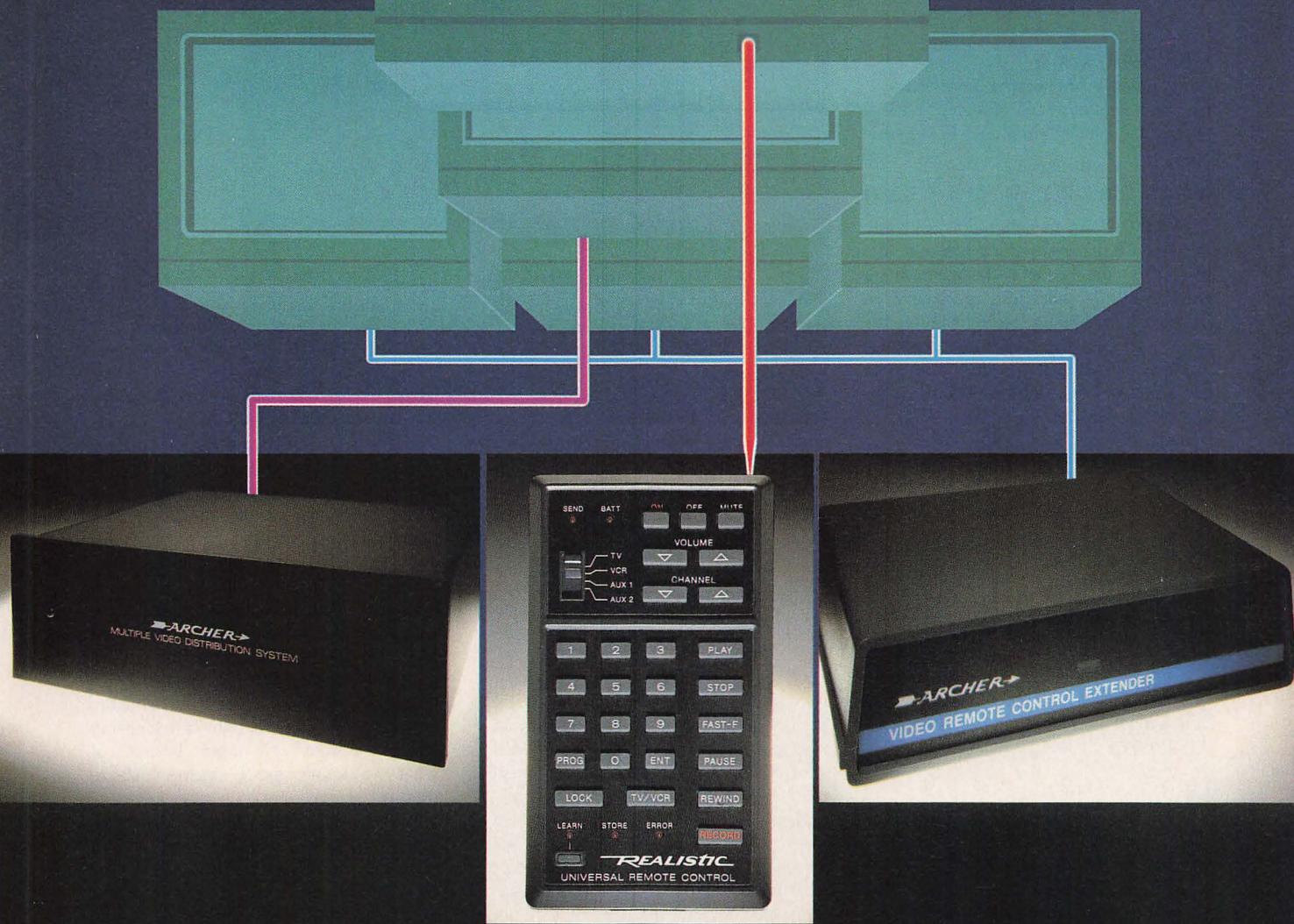
"We're going to be bigger than Prokofiev and the Beatles," Phil Collins' title character observes at one point in this well-made movie about the British Great Train Robbery of 1963—and the irony, of course, is that Collins himself already is, while the Great Train Robbers are mostly a footnote to history. Nevertheless, this account of one of the 20th century's more audacious crimes is a modestly entertaining combination of caper movie and neo-kitchen-sink realist piece. Think of it, if you will, as *Topkapi* meets *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*.

Neither of the genre elements, however, is handled with much pizazz or originality. The robbery itself is over in the blink of an eye, and the relationship between Collins' grifter-with-a-heart-of-gold and Walters' long-suffering wife is the kind of thing you can see any night on TV's *Eastenders*. What keeps the movie interesting are the uniformly first-rate performances and the period detail.

Collins, whose thespic talents have heretofore been confined to mugging through various music videos and overacting on *Miami Vice*, proves more than a match for the seasoned British professionals around him. There is one major anachronism: The theme song, the Spencer Davis Group's "Keep on Running," was actually a hit long after the events depicted here.

Buster's Collins: genesis of a train robber.





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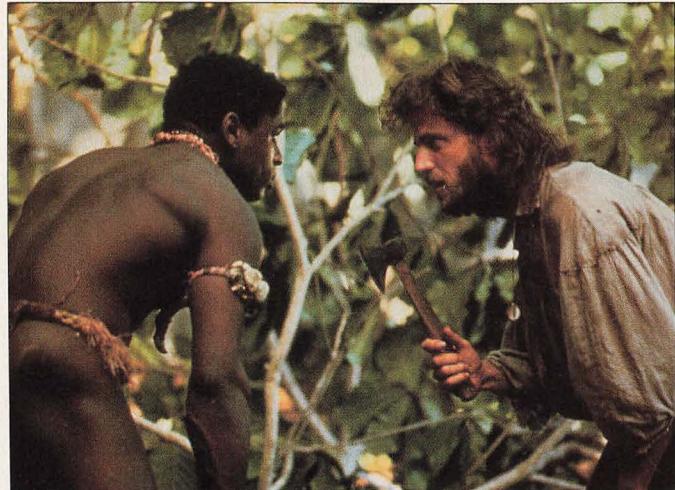
**CRUSOE ★★**

Aidan Quinn, Ade Sapara. Directed by Caleb Deschanel. 1989. Rated PG-13. (Virgin cassette, 95 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.95)

BY ROBERT DIMATTEO

This picturesque retelling of the classic Robinson Crusoe story washes over the viewer like foamy surf at the beach. It's a gentle, lulling tale told primarily in images—a tone poem, really. Making his second try as director, gifted cinematographer Deschanel (*The Black Stallion*) takes the story of a shipwrecked man's initiation into primitive forms of survival

Robert DiMatteo is also a movie and TV critic for United Features Syndicate and for the New York weekly *Seven Days*.



Rumble in the jungle: Crusoe's Sapara, Quinn.

and makes it a morally regenerative idyll with clear implications for these acquisitive, racially torn times.

Quinn stars as a profit-hungry slave

trader whose ship hits the rocks off the coast of a seemingly deserted island. Only Crusoe and the ship's dog make it to shore. There, life involves finding shelter during storms and learning to eat snails and chameleons when you haven't any other food. Soon enough, Crusoe finds that the island isn't totally unpopulated: A tribe of cannibals uses it for sacrifices and burial ceremonies. After Crusoe comes to the aid of one of the tribe's potential victims, a muscular black man, a friendship develops between the two—a friendship that gains irony and import because of what we know about Crusoe's slave-trading past.

With eyes as liquid blue as the water that surrounds the island, and with a nature-child air about him, Quinn fits right into the rustic setting. The performance is mostly carried by facial expressions and gestures; there isn't much talk in this movie. There isn't much dramatic momentum, either, though the picture still manages to cast a spell. It has a refreshing modesty and moodiness.

**SLEEPER OF THE MONTH****HEATHERS ★★**

Winona Ryder, Christian Slater, Shannen Doherty. Directed by Michael Lehmann. 1989. Rated R. (New World cassette, 102 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$89.98) □

BY ED HULSE

This cheerfully malicious black comedy came as a real surprise to jaded critics and moviegoers who expected just another witless teen comedy when it was released theatrically earlier this year. Instead, *Heathers* proved to be an offbeat, dynamic little jewel that displays imagination and excellence in every creative aspect, belying its modest budget.

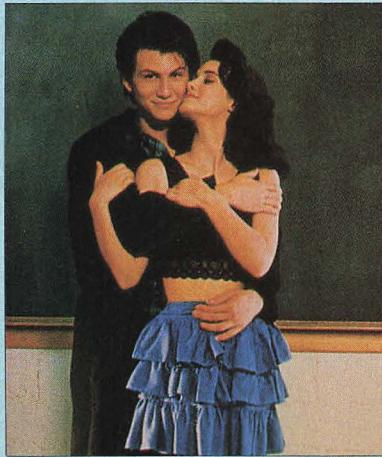
*Heathers* lampoons teen movies with savage ferocity and unrelenting tastelessness. Westerburg High isn't just a suburban school; it's a war zone where battles for popularity are fought daily by rival factions made up of jocks, nerds, dweebs and, most notably, the Heath-

ers, a cliquish quartet of attractive girls led by the sadistic Heather Chandler (Doherty). Veronica Sawyer (Ryder), weary of her status in this fab foursome, breaks ranks and allies herself with an iconoclastic loner, J.D. (Slater), who'll stop at nothing—*nothing*—to vanquish the Heathers.

As the struggle takes on Homeric magnitude, writer Daniel Waters and director Lehmann avail themselves of every opportunity to poke fun at contemporary teen mores. And they're not gentle about it. There are no sacred cows for these guys; even the tragic phenomenon of teen suicide makes satiric grist for their mill. But Waters' facile scripting and Lehmann's assured direction carry *Heathers* over the rocky terrain of bad taste with ease. One minor disappointment: The climax doesn't quite measure up to the rest of the movie. Waters, having taken such pains to play the devil with his characters early on, apparently hit a roadblock in devising a denouement as viciously clever as the subject deserved.

While watching *Heathers* on tape, my attention was focused more sharply on Slater than it was in the theater. The confining dimensions of the TV screen accentuate his finely tuned mimicry of a young Jack Nicholson. In fact, this movie is perfect for video because its charm derives from clever scripting, good characterizations and an overtly subversive *mise en scène*. It doesn't depend on visuals for impact, although Lehmann's staging and compositions are both creative and effective, losing little in their transfer to tape.

*Heathers*, simply put, is a must for lovers of offbeat, quirky little movies.



High-school cutups: Slater, Ryder.

**WHO'S HARRY CRUMB? ★**

John Candy, Jeffrey Jones, Annie Potts. Directed by Paul Flaherty. 1989. Rated PG-13. (RCA/Columbia cassette, 91 min., Hi-Fi stereo, DS, \$89.98)

BY MARK TROST

The question isn't who, but why? This is yet another cookie-cutter comedy that, in Candy's salad days, would scarcely have passed muster as a brief *SCTV* sketch.

The big, bumbling comedian plays an inept detective called in to crack a kidnapping case by the kidnapper himself (Jones), who figures that with Crumb on the case, he'll be on a plane for South America with the ransom money long before the dense dick picks up his first clue. Candy dresses up in outrageous disguises (including a Divine look-alike), but even with the aid of the able Annie Potts as the kidnap victim's stepmom, Candy can only hold up the movie for so long, before it simply falls apart.

As seen in **TIME** Magazine.

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## COCOON: THE RETURN ★

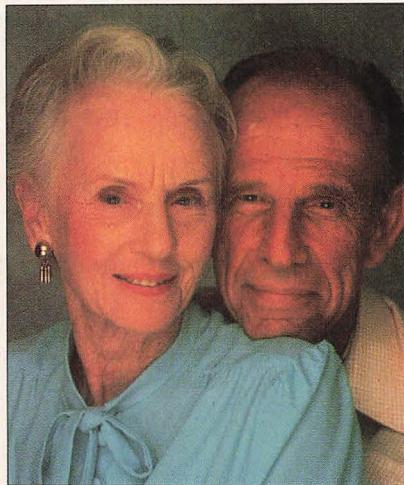
Don Ameche, Wilford Brimley, Steve Guttenberg, Jessica Tandy, Hume Cronyn, Maureen Stapleton, Gwen Verdon, Jack Gilford, Elaine Stritch. Directed by Daniel Petrie. 1989. Rated PG. (CBS/Fox cassette, 116 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.98) □

BY JEFFREY LYONS

Sequels always involve risks. Can the magic of the original be retained? Do the story and its characters have enough logical interest for continuation? For *Cocoon: The Return* the answers are disappointing. This is a sluggish, generally

uninteresting sequel to the delightful 1985 sci-fi comedy-fantasy that venerated old age and even won a supporting Oscar for Ameche, one of its many stars.

This time we're told that the cocoons the aliens left behind are in danger because of earthly seismological activity. So a group of aliens (including Raquel Welch's beautiful but vapid daughter Tawnee and Tyrone Power's namesake son) are sent to retrieve the life forms. Along for the ride are the oldsters who went away with them in the first movie and found an intergalactic fountain of youth. But, drat, one of the cocoons has fallen into the hands of sinister government agents (talk about clichés).



Cocoon-ers Tandy, Cronyn Return.

The chief trouble with this sequel is that it adds virtually nothing to the original story. Director Petrie (whose credits include *A Raisin in the Sun* and TV's *Eleanor and Franklin*) is no stranger to sensitive, intelligent works about old age. Just check out his recent *Rocket Gibraltar* (VR's March '89 Sleeper of the Month). But somehow he couldn't orchestrate the ensemble cast the way Ron Howard did for the original *Cocoon*. Everyone seems bored with their roles here. ■

## BAT 21 ★★★

Gene Hackman, Danny Glover, David Marshall Grant. Directed by Peter Markle. 1988. Rated R. (Media cassette, 106 min., Hi-Fi stereo, DS, \$89.95)

BY ROBERT D'IMATTEO

We've had a lot of Vietnam War dramas in the past few years. If this one isn't as powerful as *Platoon* or *Full Metal Jacket* or parts of *Hamburger Hill*, it is still engrossing and well-played.

Hackman is a retirement-oriented Air Force career officer who is shot down and left stranded in an area that is soon to be the location of an American bombing effort. Hackman is effortlessly effective as a guy whose sights are set on the purchase of "a condo on the seventh fairway at Tucson National," but who's stuck in a war-torn jungle. Meanwhile, Glover, a performer who prides himself on taking positive, stereotype-challenging roles, must have enjoyed the chance to play a supercompetent black pilot who saves an apathetic white lieutenant colonel.

Most of the time, the movie knows enough to stay close to these two central characters—building feeling through the actors' performances. As the two pilots communicate by radio code (in golf terminology), we feel their growing bond. The movie ends up less sticky than its strangers-can-be-brothers theme would suggest.

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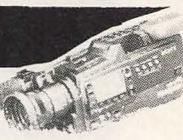
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## TAPEHEADS ★★★

John Cusack, Tim Robbins, Mary Crosby. Directed by Bill Fishman. 1988. Rated R. (Pacific Arts cassette, 93 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.95)

BY DOUG BROAD

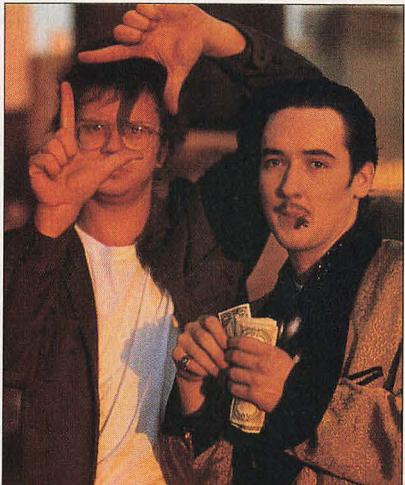
You'd think a comedy about the business of music videos, directed by someone who's made his share, would have a tendency to be arch and in-joke and not a little cynical. Well, *Tapeheads*, bankrolled by ex-Monkee turned entertainment mogul Michael Nesmith, is all this. It's also one of the smartest and funniest movies about rock 'n' roll I've ever seen.

At its most basic, the movie is a series of short, snappy set pieces that tell the tale of two young men's meteoric and accidental rise to the top of the clip-making heap. Cusack (looking like a greased weasel) and Robbins (gawky and aloof) are the scrappy duo—and their attempts to fashion their idols, downtrodden black soul icons the Swanky Modes, into video stars provide much of the cachet of mirth.

Sequences worth replaying include a white rap commercial for a chicken and waffle eatery, and the no-budget filming of a video by an a-Ha-like Euro-pop trio (who are actually lip-syncing Devo in Swedish). Keep the pause button ready for some neat cameos as well (including Nesmith himself as a water-cooler man and a startlingly out-of-character Bob Goldthwait). And *Soul Train* smoothie Don Cornelius displays perfect comic timing as the head of Fuzzball Records, who offers the tyros work "on spec."

This is the kind of picture that works best in a theater full of giddy hipsters. Upon closer viewing at home, it seems slightly disjointed and crammed—its weakest link being a noisy subplot concerning the kinky sex tapes of an unctuous presidential candidate (though he's hilariously essayed by Clu Gulager). But the movie is nothing if not fast and busy, and Fishman's flashy, video-style gimmicks (quick cuts and swooping crane shots) are never intrusive.

Robbins, Cusack: running a clip joint.



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## JUST A GIGOLO ★★

David Bowie, Marlene Dietrich, Kim Novak, Maria Schell, Sydne Rome, Curt Jurgens. Directed by David Hemmings. 1979. Rated R. (Water Bearer cassette, 98 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$59.95)

## BY ROY HEMMING

Every so often a movie that was lambasted by most critics and had only a limited theatrical run comes along on video and turns out to be more fascinating than a lot of recent hits. *Just a Gigolo* is such a rarity. I won't claim that it's a good movie—although the potential was certainly there in terms of theme, historical

setting and cast. I also can't comment on what's been cut from the original 147-minute European theatrical version or the 105-minute US release. Let's just say that what's here is an imperfect but intermittently interesting blend of *Cabaret* and parts of *Berlin Alexanderplatz*.

Bowie plays a naive young Prussian aristocrat who returns from the battlefields of WWI to a defeated, dejected and dissolute Berlin of the 1920s. He finds coping with a changed world is no easy matter economically, socially or sexually. Eventually his good looks lead him to success as a paid "gentleman of the evening" at Berlin's famous Eden Club. And who

turns up as the madam? None other than Dietrich—close to 80 in her last movie role and still looking marvelous. Only her voice betrays her age, most noticeably when she croaks the title song. But even that works in the context of the movie's decaying society subtheme.

The movie's biggest problem is its unnerving flip-flops between serious drama and tongue-in-cheek satire. Some of the latter is very funny indeed, especially a military funeral sequence worthy of Fellini or Rene Clair, and a dance number straight out of 1929-era UFA (Germany's MGM). But the shifts to serious stuff are often heavy-handed—and the cop-out ending, while ironic, is unimaginatively melodramatic.

The veddy English-looking Bowie is miscast as the young Prussian (the role calls out for a Brandauer or Griem), but he digs into it with sporadic conviction, despite a tendency to mumble some of his lines. He also contributes a song (someone else sings it) to the evocative score, which also includes contributions from the Manhattan Transfer and the Pasadena Roof Orchestra. Novak, Schell and Jurgens all do well with roles they could probably play in their sleep. (Available from Tamarelle's, 1070 Marauder St., Chico, CA 95926.)

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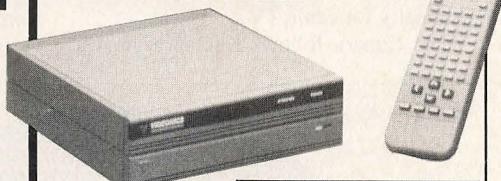
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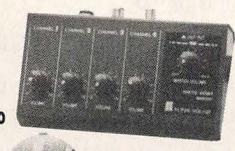
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infant son in a drowning accident. The team didn't just fight with the IRS, they also fought between themselves.

Happily, we also get snappy re-creations of some of their unforgettable comedy routines, such as "Who's on First?" Fans of the team shouldn't miss this one. It's not just entertaining, it's revealing and beautifully played.

This summer Gabe Kaplan's one-man stage show about Groucho Marx, co-written by Groucho's son Arthur, is touring parts of the US again—simultaneously with the video release of a taping made originally for cable TV.

The camera follows Kaplan around a

rather sparse set as he chomps on a cigar and lightly reminisces about Groucho's life from vaudeville to movies and TV (only a dash of critical introspection in this play, thank you). Gabe does a fine job—walking with shoulders thrust ahead and knees a bit bent, squinting and looking remarkably like Groucho. He tells a whole bunch of very funny jokes originally in Groucho's repertory, with many laugh-out-loud funny lines.

In a special promotion J2 is making *Gabe Kaplan as Groucho* available for one cent (yes!) to anyone who buys *Bud and Lou*. (J2 is at 10850 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90024.)

## EIGHT MEN OUT ★★★

John Cusack, Charlie Sheen, Christopher Lloyd. Directed by John Sayles. 1988. Rated PG. (Orion cassette, 120 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$89.98) □

## B Y E D H U L S E

Baseball's infamous "Black Sox" scandal of 1919—in which the Chicago White Sox threw the World Series in return for payoffs from big-time gamblers—was extensively documented by author Eliot Asinof in his 1963 book *Eight Men Out*. Over a decade later, actor-writer John Sayles, sensing great dramatic potential in the story, adapted Asinof's tome into a screenplay as an exercise in scriptwriting, something that interested him a great deal. Another decade and several movies later, Sayles—now a successful director—finally shot his script, skillfully capturing on film the material's inherent narrative strength. The result is Sayles' most accomplished cinematic achievement to date.

It's not a baseball movie, strictly speaking: Under Sayles' direction, the story becomes a sharply etched account of a classic struggle between Labor and Management. Sayles goes out of his way to emphasize the players' love for their sport, making them quasi-tragic victims of the team's exploitative owner and thus engendering viewer sympathy for them in their slide toward corruption and their subsequent fall from grace.

It's this emphasis on people, their strengths and weaknesses of character, that particularly suits *Eight Men Out* for video viewing. And director Sayles has assembled an unusually strong ensemble cast to bring these one-time heroes to life. Cusack, temporarily freed from the shackles of teen comedies, gives a sincere performance as Buck Weaver, the holdout whose guilt-by-association destroyed his major league career. Sheen is equally good as Hap Felsch. Mime Bill Irwin shows real acting talent as a demurring player, and popular character actor John Mahoney shines as White Sox coach Kid Gleason. But Sayles himself has the best supporting role as sportswriter Ring Lardner (to whom the director bears an astonishing resemblance), who was instrumental in breaking the scandal.

Visually, *Eight Men Out* loses very little in its transfer to video. Some scenes, played in dimly lit hotel rooms, hallways, and train corridors, are a tad dark, but not offensively so. As usual in movies depicting America in the early 20th century, the cinematography stresses soft amber and faded brown hues. The lighting is often diffused, but does not obscure the wealth of period detail. And fragments of the era's popular music are used to good effect.

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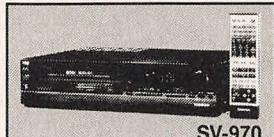
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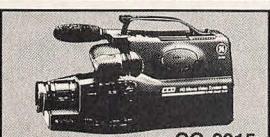
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## LETTER BOXED

### CLEAN AND SOBER ★★★

Michael Keaton, Kathy Baker, Morgan Freeman. Directed by Glenn Gordon Caron. 1988. Rated R. (Warner LV disc, 124 min., CX stereo, DS, \$29.98) □

### INNERSPACE ★★★

Dennis Quaid, Martin Short, Meg Ryan. Directed by Joe Dante. 1987. Rated PG. (Warner LV disc, 120 min., CX stereo, \$29.98) □

### I COULD GO ON SINGING ★★★

Judy Garland, Dirk Bogarde, Jack Klugman. Directed by Ronald Neame. 1963. (MGM/UA LV disc, 99 min., CX stereo, \$34.95) □

**B Y D A V I D H A J D U**

For five years now, exceptional releases on both cassette and disc have occasionally been issued in the letterbox format, which retains a widescreen movie's original aspect ratio through the use of blank space above and below the actual picture area. Over the past few months, something of a letterboxing boom has begun—mostly on videodiscs.

Disc enthusiasts (such as myself) tend to be the kind of borderline-fanatic purists

who cannot stomach the cropping or the panning and scanning customarily used to fit theatrical movies into TV screens. For not-so-fanatical viewers, letterboxing can be either an eye-opening boon or little more than a minor nicety, as this mixed bag of releases illustrates.

Most modern-day movies, including both *Clean and Sober* and *InnerSpace*, are shot in a film aspect ratio that's much closer to that of video than to such widescreen formats as CinemaScope and VistaVision. Moreover, since many new movies (including both these pictures) are shot with the eventuality of video cropping in mind, there's generally a little dead area of cropable imagery in the theatrical release. As a result, neither *Clean and Sober* nor *InnerSpace* is significantly improved by being letterboxed on disc. In fact, I could find only two shots—and I really counted 'em—in the entire 124 minutes of *Clean and Sober* when letterboxing showed notable full-screen imagery that might have lost some impact by being electronically cut into two shots. Otherwise, the movie is the same solid, dramatic study of drug and alcohol addiction it is on the non-letterboxed cassette.

As a sci-fi fantasy, *InnerSpace* might be expected to fill every micron of the screen with neato effects, fully retained through letterboxing. Unfortunately, this picture,

too, seems to have been composed with TV and video cropping in mind. Only a dozen or so shots gain from letterboxing. In my view, this is the kind of movie



**Singing Garland: filling the whole screen.**

that, more importantly, ought to be issued in CAV, so you can watch shrunken Dennis Quaid submarining through Martin Short's innards in wonderfully weird slo-mo or freeze-frame.

*I Could Go on Singing* comes from a class of '60s pictures that genuinely deserves—if not demands—letterboxing. Although the movie has more dead image area than the very best widescreen

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releases, it also has scene after scene in which the screen is filled with key content or visual counterpoint. The most vivid cases are the dramatic scenes with Garland and Bogarde, wherein we can watch both characters as they struggle to come to grips with their longtime separation and conflicting impulses toward their illegitimate son.

Beyond letterboxing, Garland fans will relish this disc release of *I Could Go on Singing* for its digital soundtrack alone. It brings compact disc quality to Garland's final film performance. The songs include Harold Arlen's title song and "By Myself." As a final bonus, this disc features the original theatrical trailers for *I Could Go on Singing*'s American and English releases (the latter retitled *The Lonely Stage*).

Former VR editor David Hajdu also writes for TV Guide, The Village Voice and Rolling Stone, and is the author of How to Shoot Your Kids on Home Video.

## CAV DISCS

### EMPIRE OF THE SUN ★★★

Christian Bale, John Malkovich.

Directed by Steven Spielberg. 1987.

Rated PG. (Warner LV disc, CAV, 153 min., CX stereo, DS, \$69.98) □

### YOU CAN'T GET THERE FROM HERE: EPHEMERAL FILMS 1946-1960 ★★★

19 short subjects and excerpts. No directors credited. 1987. B&W and color. (Voyager LV disc, CAV, approx. 60 min., \$39.95)

Funny thing—extended-play videodiscs (up to 60 minutes per side) are never labeled by their technical name, CLV. But standard-play videodiscs (30 minutes per side) are always labeled as CAV. The reason, clearly, is that there's nothing "standard" about CAV anymore. Although all laser discs were once available in this high-performance format (which offers freeze-frame and other features not available on CLV), new movies are almost never available in CAV anymore. Exceptions include many (but not all) Criterion Collection titles; the "B" sides of MCA Encore Edition discs and most X-rated titles; plus rare releases such as these two titles.

*Empire of the Sun* represents an extraordinary instance of a new movie released in CAV on a mainstream video label. Of course, it is the most recent title available on video from every techie's favorite director, Steven Spielberg. But it isn't the type of movie you'd want to watch with the remote in your hand—freezing frames, scanning scenes, keying in numbers and

zipping ahead to upcoming chapters, as you can do so well with CAV laser discs. This is not an interactive, instructional or musical program, or a masterpiece ideal for frame-by-frame study. It is a linear, narrative story. But there is one shot I froze the third time I watched *Empire of the Sun*—the shot of Jim Graham packing his suitcase—so I could take a good look at the items he treasured so dearly. Unfortunately, my review copy of *Empire* suffers from a problem common to many CAV pressings. Two out of every five frames are jittery, so I can't make out the suitcase contents any better than I could on tape or CLV disc. (The problem occurs on all six sides of my copy.)

As for *You Can't Get There from Here*, it's terrifically freezable and scannable. The program is a made-for-video anthology of obscure short subjects, industrials, educational films, commercials and other visual artifacts of post-WWII America. The 19 selections include some segments I've played over and over dozens of times, including "A Date with Your Family" (promoting clean, sexless family fun), "Design for Dreaming" (a musical extravaganza about General Motors) and "The Relaxed Wife" (an ever-so-cool commercial for sedatives). There are a few selections best viewed in the scan mode, such as "Report to Home Builders." But all told, *You Can't Get There from Here* is an enlighteningly cuckoo work of electronic anthropology—and a great party disc. (D.H.)

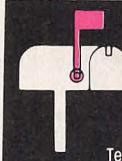
### PEOPLE, PLACES, THINGS NO. 1: FLIGHT OF THE DREAM TEAM ★

No director credited. 1988. (LumiVision LV disc, CAV, 30 min., CX stereo, surround sound, price unavailable)

One of the two or three programs released on disc only over the past year, this title is little more than video Muzak. What a waste of time, money, talent, good intentions and aluminum oxide.

*Flight of the Dream Team* is a collection of scenes of various types of skydivers, aerial gymnasts and others who leap out of airplanes for fun. While I have no doubt that their pastime is incomparably exhilarating, this videodisc is not. It shows lots of footage of jumpers—much of it taken from the air, astoundingly—yet the program makes no notable effort to make this material the slightest bit meaningful to the average viewer. There's no narration. There's no momentum; the thing starts out with nice, pretty footage and continues for 30 minutes with the same kind of thing.

The nicest thing I can say about *Flight of the Dream Team* is that watching it really does make you want to jump out of a plane—without a parachute. (D.H.)



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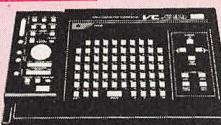
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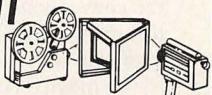


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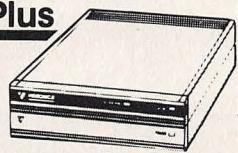


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## CLASSICS

### THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE ★★

*Lana Turner, John Garfield, Hume Cronyn, Leon Ames. Directed by Tay Garnett. 1946. B&W. (MGM/UA cassette, 112 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$29.95)*

BY RICHARD SCHICKEL

It begins with one of the movies' great erotic images. We hear the sound of a small metallic object striking the floor and see a lipstick rolling toward Frank Chambers (Garfield). He bends to retrieve it and, as he straightens up, Cora Smith (Turner), the lady who is careless with her cosmetics, is revealed from his point of view: white high heels, pouty lips, appraising eyes, impeccably lacquered blond hair—a Varga pinup of the '40s brought to improbable life.

It ends on a note of perfect irony. For Frank and Cora fall in love, commit an imperfect crime—they clumsily murder her husband—then proceed onward to their inevitable doom through an unexpected twist. The movie, like the marvelously controlled, intensely written James M. Cain novel on which it is based, is a bravely imaginative attempt to meld the conventions of pulp melodrama with the emotions we usually expect to find in high tragedy.

The movie is quite faithful to the letter of Cain's plot. But, unlike Billy Wilder's 1944 adaptation of Cain's other masterpiece, *Double Indemnity*, it softens the essential spirit of the original. Between

charge between Turner and Garfield, and only a very muted sense that they are hopelessly in thrall to blind (and morally blinding) instinct. They often seem more like adolescents experimenting with first love rather than adults grasping desperately at a last chance for happiness.

With no one at the studio worrying about their screen images, two supporting actors are permitted to raise Cain. Cronyn, at the beginning of his estimable career, does a marvelous turn as an amoral and manipulative defense attorney, and Ames, in the midst of a long Hollywood career devoted mainly to playing genial father figures, is equally fine as a smoothly menacing district attorney. When they are on screen, the movie has the kind of evil energy Turner and Garfield either could not find or were not permitted to seek. ■

### THE WIND ★★★★

*Lillian Gish, Lars Hanson, Montague Love. Directed by Victor Seastrom. 1928. B&W. (MGM/UA cassette, 88 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$29.95)*

### FLESH AND THE DEVIL ★★★

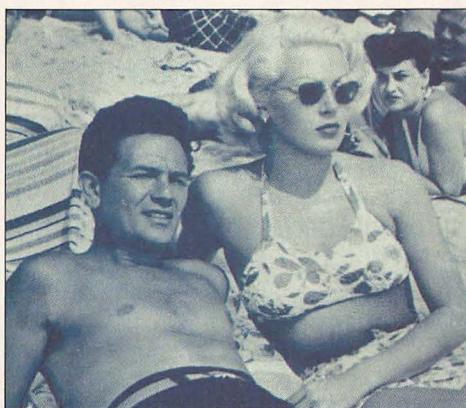
*Greta Garbo, John Gilbert, Lars Hanson. Directed by Clarence Brown. 1927. B&W. (MGM/UA cassette, 109 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$29.95)*

BY ED HULSE

MGM/UA Home Video's ongoing policy of releasing silent classics on cassette, with newly composed musical scores, is courageous as well as laudable, since the constituency for silent movies must be minuscule by any home video standard. If that constituency grows, it will be due in no small part to the pioneering efforts of MGM/UA and film historians Kevin Brownlow and David Gill, who rescued *The Wind* and *Flesh and the Devil*—among others—from relative obscurity and commissioned composer Carl Davis to write lush new musical scores for them.

*The Wind* makes a perfect introduction to silent movie technique. It also supplies a classic textbook example of wedding image and music. Davis' silent-movie scores and orchestrations (which can be heard in stereo on these tapes) are always excellent, but his music for *The Wind* is especially stirring: at times poignant and wistful, but also eerie, somber and hypnotic—not unlike the wind itself.

In the best tradition of silent-movie music, *The Wind*'s score perfectly complements the narrative and mood. Gish's character, a virginal Easterner forced by circumstances to marry a Westerner she doesn't love, fears the unrelenting winds



Special delivery for Garfield, Turner.

that arresting opening image and the bitter final irony, there is, instead of a mounting sense of doom, mostly caution—an attempt to substitute likability for pity, terror and cynicism. There is little sexual

Richard Schickel is a film critic for Time and the writer-producer of numerous TV documentaries about the movies.



Garbo and Gilbert play silent post office.

that sweep across the barren prairie. In the movie's climactic sequence, as a particularly violent sandstorm batters her tiny wooden home, Gish imagines phantasmagorical apparitions that nearly drive her insane. Davis' music underscores with real power the terrifying images so carefully chosen, photographed and edited at Seastrom's direction. It's an unforgettable episode.

*Flesh and the Devil*'s most memorable moments are the steamy scenes shared by Garbo and Gilbert, then real-life lovers. Their passion clearly permeates every frame of this movie's torrid romantic interludes. Otherwise, *Flesh* isn't quite *The Wind*'s equal. It's first and foremost a glossy star vehicle for the top-billed players, who at that time were MGM's hottest properties. The story, a handsomely mounted period piece, is essentially your basic romantic triangle: *femme fatale* Garbo vamps best friends Gilbert and Hanson, and pits them against each other to her advantage.

At 109 minutes *Flesh and the Devil* is a bit too long for its own good, even allowing for the measured pacing that characterized many pictorially lavish silents of the late '20s. Garbo's indefinable magnetism seems slightly diminished on video, too; it's possible that young, first-time viewers of *Flesh* will wonder why she was such a superstar. Then again, some may discover this charismatic actress and join her still-faithful legions of fans.

Of course, the video transfers—made from the best existing 35mm material—are excellent, although my copy of *The Wind* was framed too tightly, cutting off some heads at the top of the screen and maiming some of the lengthy intertitles. By and large, though, today's audiences are fortunate to see these great movies copied from pristine prints that reflect their original luster.

Ed Hulse is also the editor of Previews magazine and a former president of the Society for Cinephiles.



## CARTOONIES FEATURING LITTLE LULU ★★

*Animated featurettes. No directors credited. 1989 compilation. (Republic cassette, approx. 50 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$9.95)*

## COLUMBIA PICTURES CARTOONS STARRING LI'L ABNER ★

*Animated featurettes. No directors credited. 1989 compilation. (RCA/Columbia cassette, approx. 35 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$29.95)*

BY LEONARD MALTIN

I remember liking both of these 1940s cartoon series when I saw them in my childhood. When *Little Lulu* was a staple on one of my local TV stations, I so loved its title song that I committed its lyrics to memory ("Little Lulu, little Lulu, with freckles on her chin/Always in and out of trouble, but mostly always in"). *Li'l Abner* didn't get any similar TV exposure that I recall, but I did have one or two of the shorts in my collection of 8mm home movies back in the Neanderthal Age B.V. (before video).

It's always dangerous to confront one's childhood memories, as I did when I screened these two new video collections. *Little Lulu* has survived the years unscathed, however. It never was a great series; at its best, Famous Studios, its producer, was competent, not inspired. But it is cute, and my three-year-old daughter has fallen in love with the quietly mischievous Lulu. She doesn't care, however, for the *Screen Song* bouncing-ball cartoons that are sandwiched in between each of the Lulu shorts on the cassette—and I can't say I blame her, for they aren't very good.

With *Li'l Abner*, all five of the cartoons Columbia made from Al Capp's popular comic strip are collected on this one video release—although the first, "Amoozin' but Confoozin'," appears to be a truncated print. Taken as a whole, the series is awful. The cartoons are not just unfunny, but are executed with a sloppiness I've rarely seen in a Hollywood studio cartoon. The one cartoon I remember from my youth, "Sadie Hawkins Day," actually has some laughs and draws on the fertile foundation of Capp's original creation. But even the potential of this one is thwarted by bad drawing.

I'm glad I caught up with Abner to set the record straight in my mind about this series. I'm a lot happier to find that *Little Lulu* remains such a pleasant children's

Leonard Maltin is the author of *Of Mice and Magic: A History of American Animated Cartoons* and a regular on TV's *Entertainment Tonight*.

cartoon series. And there's one extra treat for the adult cartoon buffs out there: One cartoon on the cassette, "I'm Just Curious," features the original Paramount titles (instead of the credits badly refilmed by UM&M TV in the '50s). A small point, but a satisfying one.

## THE COCOANUTS ★★

*Groucho, Harpo, Chico, Zeppo Marx, Kay Francis, Oscar Shaw. Directed by Robert Florey and Joseph Santley. 1929. B&W. (MCA cassette, 96 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$29.95)*

BY ED HULSE

The Marx Brothers' first feature-length movie is more than just a little creaky by today's standards. An adaptation of their 1929 hit Broadway show, written by George S. Kaufman and Morris Ryskind,



Just a lovely bunch of Cocoanuts: Chico, Zeppo, Groucho and Harpo.

it was filmed in Paramount's Astoria (New York) studios and has most of the flaws one associates with early talkies: a static, stagey directorial technique, florid overacting from players recruited from the stage and poor sound recording.

But there are compensations. The madcap Marxes dominate every scene they're in, easily overshadowing a bland supporting cast (including femme fatale Kay Francis, who went on to better things in Hollywood). The restrictions of the film frame weren't all that different from those of the proscenium arch; both settings just barely restrained the brothers' anarchic tendencies, so the discipline of talkie moviemaking didn't unduly hamper their hyperkinetic brand of comedy.

Groucho, as a resort hotel manager tracking down stolen jewels, has some great routines, including the classic "Why a duck?" exchange with Chico. Irving Berlin wrote the songs, which are for the most part unimaginatively staged. But Marx Brothers fans won't be disappointed: *The Cocoanuts* may be their first movie, but they're already in fine form.

## VINTAGE TV

### MILTON BERLE—THE SECOND TIME AROUND: THE FUNNY FIFTIES, CARNIVAL OF COMEDY, LEGENDS ★★

*Directed by Milton Berle. 1989. (Three Kodak cassettes, 60 min. each, Hi-Fi mono, \$19.95 each or \$49.95 per set)*

BY CURT GATHJE

Compiled by Mr. Television himself, this treasure trove of old TV clips was assembled from Berle's archives of the *Texaco Star Theater*, which he hosted from 1948 to 1954. Berle has done a good job, even soft-pedaling himself in favor of more compelling material from his show's guests. They range from Frank Sinatra and Elvis Presley to Peter Lorre,

Carmen Miranda, Nat King Cole and Cole Porter.

Full of long-unseen footage, these tapes also should have crossover appeal to fans of certain performers. For example, Sinatraphiles should pounce as Frankie is liberally represented throughout. The Presley footage is abbreviated (about four minutes) but those minutes explode; the King plays straight man to Berle with unflappable cool, then launches into a live version of "Hound Dog."

Many of the comedy sketches sparkle for the same reason—for the show was shot live and its rawness is appealing in comparison to today's homogenized taped programming.

Although the staging is sometimes primitive—they were really televised radio shows with a heavy nod to burlesque traditions—these are fascinating time capsules on many levels.

The first volume, *The Funny Fifties*, is the best of the three for Elvis alone.

Longtime TV buff Curt Gathje is a New York-based critic and novelist.

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## STRIPPED TO KILL II: LIVE GIRLS

**Maria Ford, Eb Lottimer.**

Directed by Kati Shea Ruben.

1989. Rated R. (MGM/UA cassette, 90 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.95)

This effort from Roger Corman's Concorde Pictures is a sterling example of the Corman ethos in action. Writer-director Ruben definitely gives the audience what it wants. Someone is slashing the throats of strippers at the Paragon Club, and new girl Shady (the extremely striking Ford) is having razor-wielding nightmares and waking up covered in blood. Detective Decker (Lottimer) knows that she's not the killer, and the two engage in a fairly steamy romance. Sounds cliche-ridden, and it is, but Ruben provides sharp dialogue and fairly solid plotting while directing with an elan that compensates for what must have been a ridiculously low budget. As for what the audience wants: Well, the movie brims with half-naked babes and contains a fair amount of grisliness, as well as sex in unusual places. (Glenn Kenny)

## FOOD OF THE GODS, PART 2

**Paul Coufos, Lisa Schrage.**

Directed by Damian Lee. 1989.

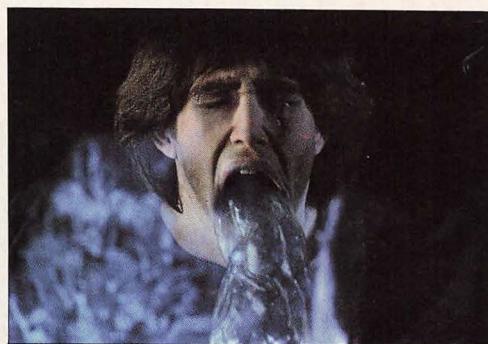
Rated R. (IVE cassette, 90 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.95)

Without the goofy casting of Marjoe Gortner, Ralph Meeker and Ida Lupino and the unabashedly phony F/X of Bert I. Gordon's original 1976 *FOTG*, this unrelated sequel had quite an act to follow. But *Part 2* is actually pretty okay, perfect brain rot for undiscriminating genre fans. In a college research lab, rats accidentally ingest an experimental growth hormone and go on what's referred to in the trade as a "ravenous feeding frenzy." As usual, it's up to the doc who

brewed the elixir to quell the rodent onslaught—but not before a particularly nutty sex scene intercut with footage of rats gnawing on giant tomatoes and a gory attack on synchronized swimmers. Funny, gruesome, really dumb junk. (Doug Brod)

gled through *Curse II* anyway. Joyriding teens driving through the desert spot snakes everywhere. And these aren't ordinary snakes, either; they're mutant reptiles nuked during the government's A-bomb testing. After being bitten by one of them,

Treas try to be sexy, but they don't measure up to the pulchritude level set by Barbi Benton and Lana Clarkson in the initial entry. (Ed Hulse)



## HELLBOUND: HELLRAISER II

**Clare Higgins, Ashley Laurence.**  
Directed by Tony Randel. 1988.  
R-rated and unrated versions  
available. (New World cassette,  
R-rated version: 93 min., unrated  
version: 98 min., Hi-Fi stereo,  
DS, \$89.95) □

Slick and incoherent, this follow-up to Clive Barker's surprise hit of a few years back is one of the silliest and most beautifully photographed horror flicks in recent years. That it's essentially a remake of the first picture—this time with a dead woman, not a dead guy, craving bodies to suck dry—is not too annoying, for director Randel records enough gamy flesh ripping and eyeball popping to keep a seasoned gorehound glued. What the movie lacks, alas, is momentum; when it ends, you hardly notice. Also, the elaboration on the mythology of the pain-monster Cenobites is pointless here, since nothing in this movie makes any sense anyway. (Doug Brod)

## CURSE II: THE BITE

**Jill Schoelen, J. Eddie Peck,  
Jamie Farr. Directed by Fred  
Goodwin. Rated R. 1989. (TWE  
cassette, 97 min., Hi-Fi stereo,  
\$89.95)**

Jamie Farr's name, appearing that high on the cast list, should have tipped me off right away, but I strug-

**Mouthing off:  
mutant snake  
takes a bite  
out of Peck.**

Peck exhibits peculiar symptoms, and savvy doctor Farr suspects that the boy's undergoing a sinister metamorphosis. Most of *Curse II* unfolds in cars, resulting in endless stretches of boring dialogue filmed in two-shots and close-ups. In an unbelievably anachronistic plot device, Farr enlists the aid of truckers via CB radio. Aside from a few good 'n' gory F/X, this shocker is strictly a schlock. By the way, its only relation to the original *Curse* is the typography used on the cassette box! (Ed Hulse)

## DEATHSTALKER III

**John Allen Nelson, Carla Herd,  
Terri Treas. Directed by Alfonso Cor-  
ona. 1988. Rated R. (Vestron cas-  
sette, Hi-Fi mono, 85 min., \$79.98)**

This lackluster sword-and-sorcery opus is far and away the series' weakest—and that's not saying much. It's okay in concept: *Deathstalker* (Nelson), at the urging of exotic princess Carissa (Herd), fights hordes of funny-helmeted warriors to keep three magical jewels from falling into the hands of an evil wizard. But the action scenes are poorly staged; sword-swinging combatants telegraph every move and practically trip over each other. The special effects never rise above the perfunctory (the most impressive trick shot is lifted from the first *Deathstalker*), and the sets are unimaginatively dressed and photographed. Female leads Herd and

## THE UNDERSTUDY: GRAVEYARD SHIFT II

**Wendy Gazelle, Silvio Oliviero,  
Ilse Von Glatz. Directed by  
Gerard Ciccoritti. 1988. Rated R.  
(Virgin cassette, 88 min., Hi-Fi  
stereo, \$79.95)**

Since it is peculiarly structured, features lots of gauzy cinematography and is not terribly gory, some might regard *The Understudy* as an admirable attempt to create horror out of mood rather than violence. I thought it was a lukewarm dish of Anne Rice-inspired pablum. Taking place on the set of a low-budget horror flick (wow, it's self-reflexive), *The Understudy* is ostensibly about make-up artist Von Glatz's efforts to bring back her vampire lover Oliviero's essence from the ozone or something. Neurotic female lead Gazelle becomes ensnared in the stratagem and finds the vampire lifestyle a little too appealing for her weedy boyfriend's taste. Gazelle and Von Glatz both have undeniable presence, and if there's any justice, will move on to better things. A big raspberry to Oliviero, though: he plays the vampire as a cross between a luded-out Eric Bogosian and much-loathed Canadian pop star Gino Vannelli. This flick's recommended only for gorehounds who still take their liberal arts degrees seriously. (Glenn Kenny)

*Understudy Oliviero's no Olivier.*



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## CANCORDERS

## STRAUSS: ELEKTRA ★★

Leonie Rysanek, Catarina Ligendza, Astrid Varnay, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Vienna Philharmonic, conducted by Karl Bohm. Directed by Gotz Friedrich. (London-PolyGram LV disc, CLV, 117 min., stereo, ADD, \$59.95)

BY THOR ECKERT JR.

When I reviewed this gripping production of Strauss' *Elektra* for *VR* as a 1987 television special, I was utterly swept away by the performance as well as by director Friedrich's arresting visual realization of the opera. And it would seem the perfect opera for PolyGram's new CD-laser disc releases—for several historic reasons. This was Bohm's last recording, finished a matter of weeks before his death. Soprano Rysanek is captured in peak form histrionically and vocally. And Varnay (herself the outstanding *Elektra* of the '50s and '60s) is as chillingly decadent a Klytaemnestra as one could ever want.

The advantage of laser disc at its best lies in the clarity of the video image wedded to the meticulous digital transfer of the soundtrack. Unfortunately, this release is not equally impressive in both areas. The sound is quite good, but somewhere in the video transfer process, the color has been leeched from too many scenes. At times flesh tones are true; at others, they are persistently greenish. Blood, which features so prominently in Friedrich's imagery, is as often black as it is red. And so it goes. At first I thought my memory might be faulty, but a comparison with my personal off-the-air tape of the original telecast showed its colors truer. This *Elektra* is so special as a performance that it should be of a quality that really shows off your video system. In this laser disc version, it is regrettably wanting in the visual impact it richly deserves.

Thor Eckert Jr. is a music critic for Opus/Musical America and a former critic for the Christian Science Monitor.

## CANTELOUBE'S SONGS OF THE AUVERGNE ★★★

Kiri Te Kanawa, English Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Jeffrey Tate. Directed by Peter Bartlett. 1989. (London-PolyGram LV disc, CLV, 53 min., stereo, DDD, \$29.95)

BY ROY HEMMING

Gorgeous. That's the word for both the visual and audio beauties of this stunning mixture of optical laser disc and CD sound. It's also as perfect an example as I've yet seen of combining a first-rate con-



*Te Kanawa: peachy sounds and scenery.*

cert performance with scenes appropriate to the work being performed.

The orchestrations that French composer Canteloube made between 1923 and 1955 of French provincial folk songs are as hauntingly sensuous, colorful and appealing as any music of this century. And they are tailor-made for the cool, liquid purity of Dame Kiri's soprano voice.

Director Bartlett wisely doesn't attempt to visualize the lyrics of each song literally—opting instead for cinematography of French locales that capture the musical mood or spirit. This is the sort of disc you'll gladly watch and listen to over and over.

## MUSIC

## LIVING COLOUR: PRIMER ★★★

*Living Colour*. Various directors. 1989. (CMV cassette, 30 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$16.98)

BY JIM FARBER

Living Colour is a group worth looking at. It's a black band that's made it big playing hard rock 'n' roll—the first outfit to pull that off since Jimi Hendrix in the late '60s. MTV played a major part in this success, airing the band's "Cult of Personality" clip long before radio picked up on the song. This compilation of the band's clips shows what MTV saw in them.

The group exudes major charisma in the performance footage—focusing on singer Corey Glover (who throws himself into the music like a whirling dervish) and lead guitarist Vernon Reid (whose fingers race up and down the fretboard with fierce expertise). There is only one pure performance piece here: a never-before-seen, live "Broken Hearts" clip. But nearly all the band's shorts feature hefty performance sections.

Following the band's lyrics, the con-

ceptual bits focus on broad social issues. "Open Letter to a Landlord" visualizes the wages of gentrification, while "Funny Vibe" re-creates the paranoid reception young blacks continue to receive in white society. The latter track, which is largely conceptual and the best clip here, covers these prejudices with an artful wit.

Similarly, in interviews with the band (sandwiched between clips), the group manages to discuss its songs' angry themes without accusatory self-righteousness, but rather with a matter-of-fact confidence. In the end, that may be Living Colour's most appealing weapon in the continued battle against pop's rigid color lines.

## A TRIBUTE TO RICKY NELSON ★★★

Ricky Nelson, Carl Perkins, Roy Orbison, Fats Domino, John Fogerty, Waylon Jennings, The Jordanaires. Directed by Taylor Hackford. 1986. (Rhino cassette, 45 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$19.95)

BY STEVE SIMELS

Because he was a TV star Ricky Nelson has never really gotten much critical respect in rock circles. In fact, far too many otherwise well-informed genre fans tend to think of Nelson as sort of the rockabilly equivalent of the Monkees, as inauthentic, wimpy, secondhand; in short, the Anti-Elvis. That's something of a bum rap, of course, and the nice thing about this combination concert video/posthumous tribute is that, despite occasional lapses into hagiography, Nelson's genuine talents come across with no apologies necessary.

There's interview footage, overly heartfelt tributes from his peers, old TV clips and a concert performance shot just before Nelson's death in a 1986 plane crash. That last, however, is close to revelatory: Backed by a crack rockabilly band, Nelson looks great, sounds better and runs through his '50s hits with unforced energy and enthusiasm.

The point is that this is not a nostalgia trip but rather an artist—yes, an artist—reprising an estimable body of work. And if you remain unconvinced, check out the performances here of "Hello Mary Lou" and "Stood Up" (which guest fan John Fogerty correctly pegs as one of the most perfect rock records ever made).

Meanwhile, leave it to Sam Philips—the visionary record producer behind Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins and Johnny Cash—to cut through all the what-a-beautiful-cat pronouncements professed by most of the celebrities on the tape. Nelson, he observes, "could sing a ballad

Steve Simels is the author of *Gender Chameleons: Androgyny in Rock 'n' Roll* and is a critic for *Stereo Review*.

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and still make your foot wanna move." That's good rock criticism. It's also the reason that Nelson, as with all things hep, deserves to be honored—which, in the final analysis, *A Tribute to Ricky Nelson* does quite nicely.

## MICHAEL JACKSON: THE LEGEND CONTINUES ★

*Michael Jackson, the Jackson Five.*  
Directed by Patrick Kelly. 1989.  
(Vestron cassette, 53 min., Hi-Fi  
stereo, \$15.98)

This docu-bio look at the music world's reigning exemplar of arrested development is as shameless a piece of piffery as has come down the video pike in quite a while. The Gloved One himself was the co-executive producer, so you know you're not going to get hard-hitting investigative journalism.

Nevertheless, for both hardcore fans and pop-culture historians, there are moments worth pondering. For the former, there are generous excerpts from Jackson's legendary (and still impressive) Motown TV special performance, snippets from a 1968 audition tape (caught by early videophile Berry Gordy) and lots of good music. For the latter, there are appearances with Cher and Jim Nabors, fawning celebrity quotes from the likes of Sammy Davis Jr., Hermes Pan and Elizabeth Taylor (who notes that Michael "really is E.T.") and, best of all, a clip of the star at age 11, which proves that his weirdness is not a recent development. ("I like swimming," he tells an off-camera interviewer, "playing basketball . . . and



Glitz Jackson: gloved and loved.

catching lizards." Sheesh.)

The whole thing is narrated by James Earl Jones in his best Darth Vader tones, adding to an already overwhelming atmosphere of surrealist showbiz glitz. Definitely worth a rental, although probably not for the reasons anybody connected with it intended. (S.S.)

## JIMI PLAYS MONTEREY ★★

*The Jimi Hendrix Experience.* Directed by D.A. Pennebaker and Chris Hegedus. 1988. (HBO cassette, 49 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$19.99)

Anybody who's ever seen *Monterey Pop*—Pennebaker's documentary on the

first-ever rock festival (Criterion's new laser disc version is the one to watch)—knows that ultimately it's a frustrating experience. Pennebaker, a fine moviemaker but a lousy rock critic, devoted far too much screen time to inferior groups and then truncated superb turns by the festival's most exciting performers.

The good news, however, is that he also filmed a lot more footage than he ultimately used and that his archives are finally opening up—witness *Jimi Plays Monterey*, a record of the entire Hendrix Monterey performance. (Actually, it's not quite the complete set: The opening "Can You See Me" is only heard on the soundtrack.) Of course, the audio version of all this has been available for some time. And the previously unseen footage is, alas, as indifferently shot as the rest of *Monterey Pop*.

Still, this is a fascinating package. Hendrix was obviously up for his performance (the band's American debut) and he pulled out all the stops—drowning his solos in feedback, howling like the electrified ghost of Robert Johnson, covering Bob Dylan's greatest song (in 1967, an incredibly audacious move), and for the finale, setting fire to his guitar, a then-unheard-of ritual sacrifice clearly meant to upstage the Who (they'd smashed their instruments earlier in the festival).

Of course, time has a way of neutering genuine innovators, and much of what Hendrix does seems less than revolutionary now that so much of it is part of the everyday vocabulary of heavy metal. Nevertheless, Hendrix does come across as a riveting presence, and some of his guitar work (on "Killing Floor," for example) remains mysterious and induplicable—there are noises here that he surely took with him to the grave.

All things considered, and given the tape's astonishingly vivid digitally remastered soundtrack (not as good as the CD, but close), *Jimi Plays Monterey* is a definite keeper. (S.S.)

## S P O R T S

### MICKEY MANTLE: THE AMERICAN DREAM COMES TO LIFE ★★★

Directed by Richard Hall. 1989. (Fox Hills/Media cassette, 55 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$19.95)

## B Y P E T E C O U T R O S

Try this one on for size: "Mickey Mantle, raconteur." Painfully reticent during most of his brilliant baseball career and often incommunicado in the trainers' room, the legend that wore the Yankees'

Pete Coutros is a sportswriter for the New York Post.

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"Crowd Pleasers" is the umbrella name that HBO Video is giving to one of the biggest groups of low-price releases any major company has yet come up with—Involving no fewer than 65 cassettes from the HBO catalog to be rereleased between August and December. Among them are such comedy releases at \$19.99 as *Benny Hill's Crazy World*, *The Roseanne Barr Show*, *Sam Kinison Live!*, *George Carlin: What Am I Doing in New Jersey?*, *Joe Piscopo Live!* and *Jackie Mason on Broadway*. Sports titles in the group, also at \$19.99, include *Mike Tyson's Knockouts*, *Legendary Champions*, *Boxing's Greatest Champions* and *The Heavyweights—The Big Punchers*.

Trekkie alert! Not only will Paramount be offering *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* at \$14.95 this summer, but also three of its sequels: *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*, *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock* and *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*. Also from Paramount at \$14.95 are these rereleases: *Beverly Hills Cop*, *Flashdance*, *Trading Places*, *Airplane!*, 48 HRS., *Witness* and *Shane*.

Sam Peckinpah's first feature, *Deadly Companions* (1961), becomes available from New World at \$14.95. Other low-price New World titles include *Night Patrol*, *Prison* and Whoopi Goldberg's *The Telephone*, all at \$9.95.

Rob Reiner fans can add a trio of his most popular movies to their collections in a special three-pack set for \$49.98, available from Nelson in August. The movies: *This Is Spinal Tap*, *The Sure Thing* and *The Princess Bride*. Also from Nelson, as part of its "Reel Deals '89" promotion this summer, will be *White Mischief*, *A Time of Destiny* and *High Season*, at \$19.98 each.

"Virgin Sacrifices" is the promotional come-on for a group of not necessarily virtuous summer rereleases from Virgin at \$19.95. Included are *A Prayer for the Dying*, *The Rosary Murders*, *Pick Up Your Ears*, *Prom Night*, *Hello Mary Lou: Prom Night II* and *Love at First Sight*.

Four fantasy classics from legendary special-effects pioneer Ray Harryhausen are on RCA/Columbia's summer bargain list at \$19.95: *Jason and the Argonauts*, *Mysterious Island*, *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad* and *First Men in the Moon*. Up, up and away! (Roy Hemming)

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number 7 for 18 glorious years is transformed into Mr. Verbosity himself in this 55-minute look at what can only be described as the halcyon days of baseball in New York.

Ensconced in an easy chair in front of an array of his mementos—trophies, a pair of bronzed spikes, a slew of what he calls “significant” baseballs—the miner’s son who achieved fame by hitting the horsehide improbable distances (for him, they brought out the tape measure) retraces his progress from petrified rookie to that ultimate recognition: Mickey Mantle Day, with 67,000 fans venting their adoration. There are lots of wonderful anecdotes and archival footage.

There is, naturally, extensive use of the first-person singular in his narration, as well as “me, Whitey and Billy” (Whitey being Ford the redoubtable southpaw, and Billy being Martin, incorrigibly so). They were the Three Musketeers of Madcap, their late-night pub-crawling peccadilloes delighting tabloid editors, even as they drove their manager to distraction.

The manager was the legendary Casey Stengel, Mickey’s sort-of surrogate father. Casey’s syntax was only distantly related to the English language. Watching him testify before a Senate committee probing baseball in the ‘50s (for possible antitrust violations) is one of the cassette’s larger joys, as the wizened skipper pro-

ceeds to confound the solons with an outpouring of Stengelese that would daunt even the most learned cryptographer.

Two of the funniest tales recounted by Mantle have to do with crawling through a transom to circumvent a curfew and shooting a farmer’s indolent mule. There is something of a cracker-barrel flavor to Mantle’s storytelling, but this only enhances the homespun quality of the production.

The saga of this Magnificent Yankee has been related often in the press, but there is nothing quite like hearing it from the party of the first part in his own Oklahoma drawl. In that respect, and in many other ways, this first entry in Media’s proposed “videography series” is a home run with the bases loaded.

## F I T N E S S

### SHAPE UP WITH MARY HART ★★★

*Mary Hart. Directed by Michael Bernhaut. 1989. (Avon Video Enterprises cassette, 45 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$19.95)*

BY JENNIFER STERN

Mary Hart is our real Miss America. She (or at least her public persona) is wholesome, sweet, pretty and enthusiastic—like an Iowa farm girl who made it

big. Those of us who get our daily dosage of celebrity gossip from her pseudo-news program *Entertainment Tonight* (where she has survived three male co-hosts) can’t help but respond to her bell-like voice from the moment she says, “Hi, I’m Mary Hart,” at the opening of this well-crafted—and already bestselling—addition to the ranks of celebrity exercise videotapes.

Designed for Hart by the National Aerobic Championship—it’s not the National Institute of Health, but it sounds impressive anyway—the three-part exercise program (low-impact aerobics, floor exercises, final stretch) is safe, fun, effective and encouraging. In short, it’s as near-perfect as Hart herself. The only problem is that while it tries to be all things to all people (for all skill levels and all ages, she explains), the tape is really best suited to beginners.

Appropriately, the tape is being sold exclusively through that all-American self-improvement company, Avon. Perhaps the best thing about *Shape Up* is that it is not too intimidating: It’s not too long, Hart is not too gorgeous and the exercises are not too hard. And for those who need a lot of encouragement to do any exercise at all, that is a very good thing.

*Fitness maven Jennifer Stern writes regularly for Seven Days and VR.*



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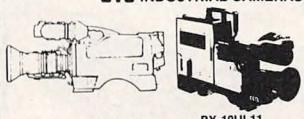
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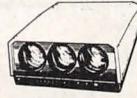
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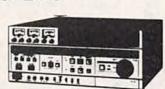
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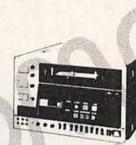
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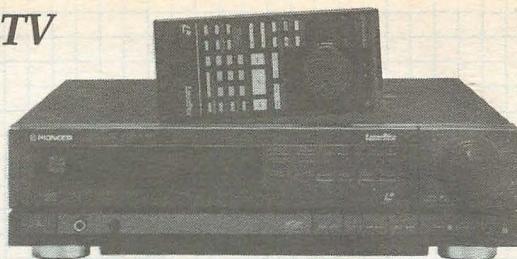
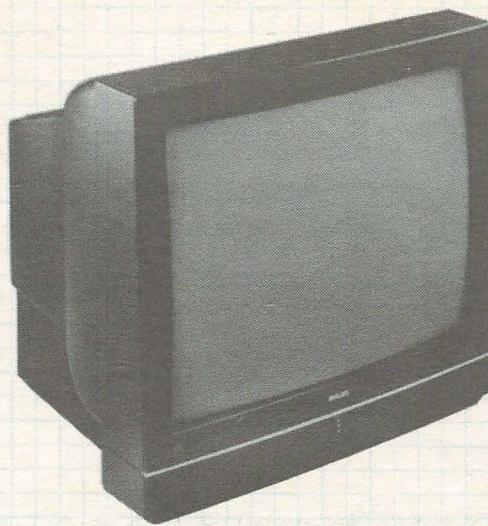
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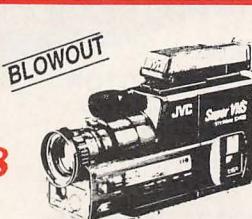
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VR8/89

## HEALTH

### WHEN MOM AND DAD BREAK UP ★★

Hosted by Alan Thicke. Directed by Ron Kantor. 1989. (Paramount cassette, 30 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$24.95)

BY MEG WHITCOMB

Aimed at adolescents whose parents are going through a divorce, this tape certainly has a worthy purpose. But it is a confusing combination of narration, testimonials from kids who tell how painful divorce is, cutesy songs and a dumb cartoon cat with a pink mask and an orange hat who looks like a cross between Garfield and the Masked Bandit.

Kids whose parents are splitting up want answers. Narrator Thicke explains why some parents refuse to talk about their breakup, why it's normal for kids to feel frightened and how they can love *both* parents without taking sides. But he doesn't go far enough. Example: Just when he gets to the nitty-gritty of explaining why children shouldn't blame themselves for their parents' breakup (a common reaction), the scene shifts banally to a little boy sitting forlornly on the edge of an unmade bed singing, "If Only I Had Cleaned My Room." For the pre-adolescent, this could be an unconstructive downer. And would a mother feeling bad about her divorce really sing a lullaby called "I Want You to Stay and Hold Me Tight" to her eight-year-old? In my view, this only adds the burden of pity to a child's feelings of confusion and grief.

But there are good points, too. Thicke explains why it's okay to lock yourself in your room and cry, and he offers tips on how to get the folks to talk about what's happening. Most important, he explains why there is usually nothing a child can do to bring his or her parents back together.

Former Life editor Meg Whitcomb writes the nationally syndicated Dear Meg newspaper column.

At least he offers hope at the end when he says, "When you understand that your parents will always love you no matter what happens, you'll feel more secure. You are the best thing that ever happened to them."

### STRESS MANAGER ★★

*Narrated and directed by Jon Mark.*

*Based on the research of Jeanne Achterberg, Ph.D., and G. Frank Lawlis, Ph.D. 1986. (New Era Media cassette, 30 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$29.95)*

BY BARRY JACOBS

Employing psychological principles of relaxation and a we-are-all-beautiful, hippie-type philosophy, this tape is to stress management what New Age music is to popular song: simple, soft-headed but often mesmerizing in its gentle flow.

Director and composer Mark has crafted a series of beautifully arresting images—of rain-splattered leaves, melting ice and what look like the amorphous globules of a lava lamp—and backed them with slow, repetitive synthesizer and piano crescendos, which match the images in grace. He then intones in a rich, meditative baritone about the ability we each have to shed all of our concerns and become healthier universal beings.

As with many New Age products, this program promises more than it delivers. It's also short on technique. Even with the accompanying booklet (on the deleterious effects of stress and suggestions for reducing them), the program contains far less specific breathing and imagery exercises than the average relaxation audiotape.

But the very experience of taking in the sights and sounds via video is still a deeply relaxing one. Scheduled regularly, it won't get you to nirvana but it should help immunize you against some worldly wear and tear. (New Era Media is at 425 Alabama St., San Francisco, CA 94110.)

Former VR senior editor Barry Jacobs is also a clinical psychologist.

## KIDS VID

### CLASSIC FAIRY TALES ★★

*Animated featurette. No director credited. 1982. (FHE cassette, 62 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$14.95)*

BY GENEVIEVE A. KAZDIN

This is one of the best video collections of fairy tales I've seen for children age three and up—partly because the art work is so well-suited to the character of each of its five stories. Depending on a young viewer's attention span, it's possible to make this tape last four or five days.

*The Ugly Duckling* is a lovely story of hope and coming into one's own. This version is particularly notable for its fine art work. *The Emperor's New Clothes*, as always, is a delightful morality play. Just remember, however, that the point of the story is that the emperor is naked. And so he is here—undisguisedly, completely, albeit briefly. The style of the animation is such that this apparition is more hilarious than salacious.

Parents tend to forget the details of fairy tales, remembering them as simple, sweet stories of beautiful princesses and brave princes. Well, go back and read *Rapunzel*. It's neither sweet nor simple. Happy ending notwithstanding, it is a violent story. It is beautifully presented, but frightening—so be forewarned.

The other two stories in this anthology are *The Princess and the Pea* and *The Three Musicians*—both delightfully done.

### BERENSTAIN BEARS: IN THE DARK ★★

*Animated featurette. Voices of Ruth Buzzi, David Mendenhall. Directed by Buzz Potamkin. 1985. (Random House cassette, 30 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$14.95) □*

Two separate episodes featuring the beloved Bear family offer a relevant, reassuring story dealing with a common childhood problem, plus a funny family adventure for kids of three or four.

*In the Dark* tells of Sister Bear's terror of the dark and her penchant for seeing scary things in the shadows. Papa Bear helps her deal with her fears and control her wayward imagination. He handles the situation with warmth, caring and humor.

The second story, *Ring the Bell*, finds Papa Bear preparing his famous six-flavor honey for a country fair. Papa finds himself contending not only with angry bees but also with Two-Ton Grizzly.

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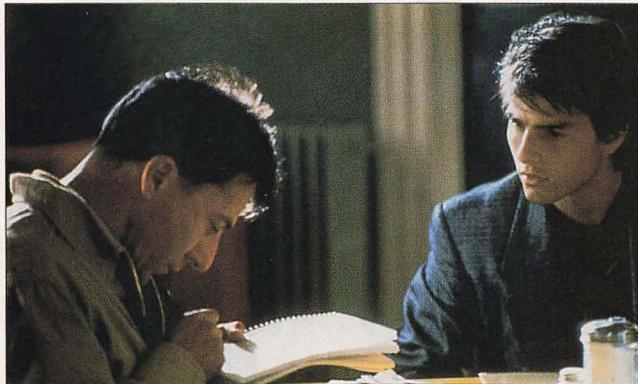
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## PREVIEWS



Oh, brother: Hoffman writes, Cruise wrongs in *Rain Man*.

#### DRAMA

**CINDERELLA LIBERTY** (1973) A sailor (James Caan) strikes gold in a prostitute's (Marsha Mason) heart. Rated R. (CBS/Fox, July 7)

**A DANDY IN ASPIC** (1968) A Soviet mole (Laurence Harvey) posing as a British spy longs for mother Russia. With Mia Farrow, Tom Courtenay. (RCA/Columbia, July 13)

**THE GOLD AND GLORY** (1989) Sibling rivals enter a grueling contest for a ballerina's attention. With Colin Friels. Rated PG-13. (IVE, July 20)

**NIGHTBREAKER** (1989) Dr. Brown (Martin Sheen) flashes back to his unsafe atomic tests of the '50s, when he was Emilio Estevez. (Turner, July 5)

**RAIN MAN** (1988) Dustin Hoffman as Tom Cruise's long-lost brother, an autistic savant. Winner of four '89 Oscars. Rated R. (MGM/UA, Aug. 30)

#### VINTAGE TV

**THE I LOVE LUCY COLLECTION** (1950s) Four volumes (available separately) from Lucille Ball's TV series, with two complete shows on each tape. Included: "Lucy Does a TV Commercial," "Lucy's Italian Movie," "Lucy and Harpo Marx" and "Lucy Is Enceinte." (CBS/Fox, June 22)

#### COMEDY

**ALL'S FAIR** (1989) Lou Ferrigno, Robert Carradine and Sally Kellerman swap paint pellets in a wacky weekend war game. Rated PG-13. (Media, July 7)

**ASSAULT OF THE PARTY NERDS** (1989) On a typical univer-

sity's caste system, that is. Linnea Quigley and Troy Donahue dodge beer cans. Rated R. (Prism, Aug. 3)

**BILL & TED'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE** (1989) Spaceman George Carlin takes, like, two real-



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Reeves are  
dudes among  
men.

ly cool dudes back in time. With Keanu Reeves, Alex Winter. Rated PG. (Nelson, Aug. 31)

**THE 'BURBS** (1989) Tom Hanks and Carrie Fisher have spooky neighbors. Directed by Joe Dante. Rated PG. (MCA, Aug. 10)

**MIDDLE AGE CRAZY** (1980) Bruce Dern's cool crumbles when his wife (Ann-Margret) throws a 40th birthday party for him. Rated R. (CBS/Fox, July 7)

**POLICE ACADEMY 6: CITY UNDER SIEGE** (1989) Bubba Smith, Michael Winslow and company defend property values. Rated PG. (Warner, July 26)

**SIZZLE BEACH** (1988) Three young beauties descend upon Malibu, California, in search of Kevin Costner. R-rated and unrated versions available. (Vidmark, July 26)

**SUMMER JOB** (1988) A resort hotel's seasonals trade towel snaps and love until ex-ELO members (OrKestra) arrive for a gig. With Kathy Shield. (SVS, July 27)

**2 IDIOTS IN HOLLYWOOD** (1988) They came from Ohio, bearing cold cuts. With Jim McGrath, Jeff Doucette. Rated R. (New World, July 25)

#### ACTION

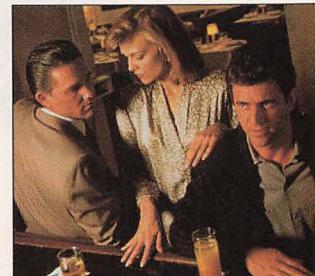
**DESPERATION RISING** (1989) Brutal L.A. street gangs in drug wars and class struggles. With Nick Cassavetes. Unrated. (Legacy, July 7)

**DEAD AIM** (1988) Diplomats and dirty dancers figure in Det. Ed Marinaro's murder investigation. With Corbin Bernsen. Rated R. (Vestron, July 26)

**THE EMISSARY** (1988) In South Africa, KGB creeps kidnap a US en-

**STALKING DANGER** (1987) International assassins deep-six some major scientists. Directed by William Friedkin. Rated PG. (Vidmark, Aug. 23)

**TEQUILA SUNRISE** (1988) Buddies on opposite sides of the law (Mel



Drink up: smoldering Tequila trio.

Gibson, Kurt Russell) snake after Michelle Pfeiffer. Rated R. (Warner, Aug. 2)

**THE TONGFATHER** (1978) A kung-fu crimefighter refuses offers normally accepted graciously. Rated R. (King Bee, July 20)

**TWO WRONGS MAKE A RIGHT** (1989) Club owner Ivan Rogers busts up extortionists and time-honored maxims with righteous abandon. Not rated. (Unicorn, July 5)

#### SUSPENSE

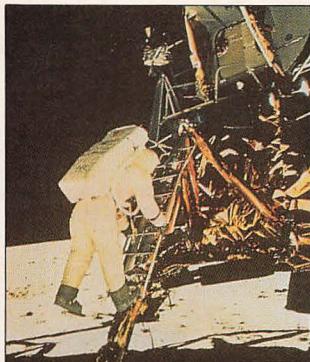
**LADY AVENGER** (1989) Pretty Peggie Sanders, just sprung from jail, sets out to bust some heads. Rated R. (South Gate, July 7)



Shady Lady: going for the kill.

**TAINTED** (1988) When Shari Shattuck's husband dies while killing her assailant, she opts for a cover-up. Unrated. (South Gate, July 5)

**THRILLED TO DEATH** (1988) A novelist and his wife turn to swinging as research. Death ensues. With Blake Bahner. Rated R. (Republic, July 12)



Man goes down ladder of success.

## DOCUMENTARY

**MAN ON THE MOON** (1989) For the moonwalk's 20th anniversary, Walter Cronkite and the Apollo astronauts recall the first lunar steps. (CBS/Fox, July 20)

**NOVA** A trio of new tapes joins the collection. *All American Bear* focuses on the North American Black Bear; *One Small Step* covers the early years of the space race; *Predictable Disaster* explains earthquakes. (Vestron, June 7)

## FANTASY

**WINGS OF DESIRE** (1987) A curious angel (Bruno Ganz) becomes mortal. With Peter Falk. Directed by Wim Wenders. Rated PG-13. (Orion, Aug. 31)

## MUSIC

**GLENN GOULD: A PORTRAIT** (1988) The eccentric ivory-tickler's enigmatic past is explored on a grand scale. (Kultur, July 6)

**JERRY LEE LEWIS: I AM WHAT I AM** (1989) Jerry Lee Lewis explains himself. With Johnny Cash, Jimmy Swaggert. (J2, July 5)

**SOME ENCHANTED EVENING** (1987) Willie Nelson warbles 60 minutes' worth of his best. (Cabin Fever, July 5)

## ANIMATION

**DAFFY DUCK'S QUACKBUSTERS** (1988) The lisping, crash-prone duck mocks horror-pic clichés. Rated G. (Warner, July 19)



Duck deluxe: Desktop Daffy is in the money.

## THE LAND BEFORE TIME

(1988) A baby dinosaur quintet seeks to escape Henry Luce in "The Great Valley." A George Lucas/Steven Spielberg production. Directed by Don Bluth (*An American Tail*). Rated G. (MCA, Sept. 14)

## FITNESS

**KATHY SMITH'S PREGNANCY WORKOUT** (1989) A 90-minute program for moms-to-be. (Media, July 12)

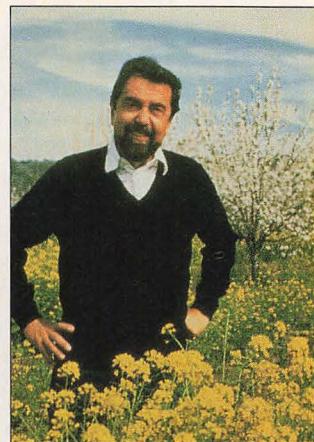
## BALLET

**THE LADY OF THE CAMELLIAS** (1987) Director/choreographer John Neumeier sets the classic Dumas novel to Chopin's music. With Marcia Haydee. (Kultur, July 5)

## KID VID

**COLUMBIA PICTURES CARTOONS STARRING MR. MAGOO** (1960) A small, near-sighted cartoon man develops his own reality, with Jim Backus' voice. (RCA/Columbia, July 13)

**MIRTHWORMS ON STAGE** (1989) They "crawl right into your heart." Animated. (IVE, July 20)



Leo: *Miracle-Grow for the soul.*

## XXXXs & 0000s

**LEO BUSCAGLIA: GIVE LOVE** (1989) A 70-minute lecture by the author, teacher, love advocate and all-around nice guy. (Vestron, July 26)

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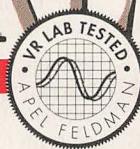
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CUSTOMER SERVICE

SHIPPING INFORMATION

713-240-3202

# TEST REPORTS



## SUMMARY

### Pioneer Combination Laser Disc/CD Player, Model CLD-1070

This combination disc player, which can handle five different laser audio and/or video formats, is an amazing breakthrough for the disc industry. In terms of features, Pioneer's CLD-1070 is not *radically* different from the CLD-1030 model it replaces in the company's line of disc players, but as for consumer value, the 1070 is unprecedented; its suggested retail price of \$600 ought to win over a lot of converts.

As well it should. Videophiles have long touted the laser disc format for being far superior, in both video and audio reproduction, to the VHS format. As the video and digital audio performance of this player attest, that's entirely true. Now that public awareness of the laser disc format is reaching new highs (and software companies are kicking in with low prices on blockbuster disc releases), this player is timely indeed. Aside from eight- and 12-inch laser discs, the CLD-1070 also plays three- and five-inch compact discs and CD-Vs (the five-inch discs containing five minutes of video and digital audio and 20 minutes of just audio). It plays them all well, too; while hardcore audiophiles may blanch at the 79.3 dB signal-to-noise ratio measured for the player's compact disc section (most other players get upwards of 90 dB at least), most listeners will find the performance more than satisfactory.

The player offers a number of programming and convenience features that are quite versatile. Since most retailers price items like this substantially below list, chances are you'll see this player going for less than \$600. As such, it makes a terrific, and affordable, introduction to the impeccable quality and appeal of the disc format.

## FEATURES

When playing back a videodisc that's been divided into chapters (as most are), you can select up to 24 chapters and play them back in any order. Similarly, you can program 24 CD tracks to play in any order as well. The "auto program editing" feature lets you set an amount of time (say, 45 minutes) and will

automatically play back the tracks of a CD that will fit in that time frame. This is quite handy when making an audiotape from a CD, which, of course, you shouldn't do. When playing a CD-V, the CLD-1070 will automatically play back the video section first. With discs manufactured in the CAV format, special effects, such as freeze-frame,

frame-by-frame advance and slow-motion, are instantly available. The CLD-1070 has four repeat playback modes: memory repeat, chapter repeat, side repeat and section repeat.

## CONTROLS

The front panel layout of the CLD-1070 is similar to that of Pioneer's earlier combination players. The disc drawer occupies most of the upper section of the panel, with a stop/open button directly to the right of the drawer. The drawer itself is segmented to accept the five different disc types. The power switch is at the lower left, next to a stereo headphone jack. A display window near the center of the panel offers a wide variety of status indicators, including a visual calendar showing track or chapter numbers, frame and/or time indications, type of disc playing, repeat mode, audio mode and more. Number buttons to the right of the display area are used for programming and track/chapter/frame selection. At the extreme right of the panel are play/pause, random play (which will play CD tracks in a random order), skip, scan, auto-edit programming and intro scan buttons. The intro scan feature locates the beginning of each chapter of a videodisc and plays it for about eight seconds.

The remote control duplicates the front panel buttons and operates the special effects on CAV discs. Other keys let you select audio channels and switch between the analog and digital soundtracks of a disc; often on special edition discs, the content of these soundtracks differs.

The rear panel has antenna ins and outs, as well as direct A/V outputs.

## TEST RESULTS

The videodisc format yields a lot more picture detail than conventional VHS. This is borne out not only by the fact that video frequency response on this player extended to 4.20 MHz (most VHS decks peak at around 2 MHz), but that once there, signal strength degenerated by a measly 2.5 dB. The sharp, detailed picture of the laser format is dramatically noticeable. Other video parameters on this player were also excellent; signal-to-noise ratios for chroma AM (color) were as high as 46.6 dB, while luminance (brightness) measurements were as high as 42.1 dB. Stairstep linearity (the player's ability to reproduce shades of gray between black and white) was exemplary; the maximum deviation from perfect linearity was a mere 3%.

Analog audio tracks on laser discs are helped immensely by the CX noise reduction system, which boosted the analog

signal-to-noise ratio from 57.3 dB to a full 75.0 dB. Laser disc digital audio tracks will sound awesome; the digital audio section of the CLD-1070 has a signal-to-noise ratio of an amazing 100 dB, while channel separation was superdynamic, substantially above 80 dB.

With all that, some might feel the CD section's relatively weak signal-to-noise showing of 79.3 dB is a letdown. Still, in our listening tests, we found the playback of CDs to be more than adequate; distortion was insignificant and frequency response full and rich. Number-obsessed audiophiles may well balk, but most listeners won't find anything to complain about.

For years Pioneer has manufactured players that we found commendable for their ingenuity and fine engineering. With this new, affordable player, it looks as if the resurrection of the laser disc format will take off with a vengeance. —Len Feldman

### LAB MEASUREMENTS:

#### Pioneer Combination Laser Disc/CD Player

Model Number: CLD-1070  
Serial Number: TC3930F7U

### VIDEO SECTION

FREQUENCY RESPONSE (at 4.20 MHz)	
Video Output	-2.5 dB
TV Output	-2.5 dB

### SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIOS

Red-Field Chroma (AM/PM)	
Video Output	46.3/36.6 dB
TV Output	46.6/37.9 dB
Luminance	
Video Output	42.1 dB
TV Output	41.7 dB

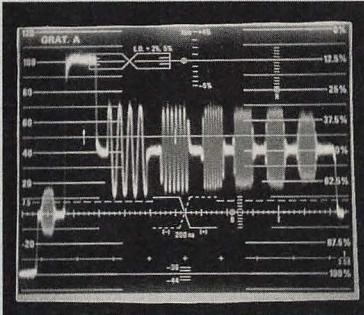
### ANALOG AUDIO SECTION

OUTPUT LEVEL	
CX On/Off	1.58/.57 Volts
THD AT REFERENCED OUTPUT	
CX On/Off	.18/.034%
TOTAL HARMONIC DISTORTION	
(1 kHz, 75% modulation)	
CX On/Off	.074/.063%
SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO	
CX On/Off	75.0/57.3 dB

### DIGITAL AUDIO SECTION

OUTPUT LEVEL	
	2.41 Volts

#### Video Frequency Response



### TOTAL HARMONIC DISTORTION (at 0 dB)

20 Hz	.03%
1 kHz	.016%
10 kHz	.016%
16 kHz	.016%

### SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO

De-emphasis in	92.8 dB
De-emphasis out	100.0 dB

### DE-EMPHASIS ERROR

1 kHz	+.002 dB
5 kHz	-.18 dB
16 kHz	+.054 dB

### LINEARITY ERROR

0 dB to -50 dB	+.044 dB
----------------	----------

### FREQUENCY RESPONSE

20 Hz to 20 kHz	+.036 dB to -.22 dB
-----------------	---------------------

### CHANNEL SEPARATION (at 0 dB, 1 kHz)

Left/Right	84.1/88.1 dB
------------	--------------

### COMPACT DISC SECTION

#### OUTPUT LEVEL

2.41 Volts

#### TOTAL HARMONIC DISTORTION (at 0 dB)

20 Hz	.038%
1 kHz	.016%
10 kHz	.016%
16 kHz	.016%

#### SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO

(A-weighted)	79.3 dB
--------------	---------

#### DE-EMPHASIS ERROR

1 kHz	+.07 dB
5 kHz	+.04 dB
16 kHz	-.04 dB

#### LINEARITY ERROR

0 dB to -50 dB	+.06 dB
----------------	---------

#### FREQUENCY RESPONSE

20 Hz to 20 kHz	+.0 dB to -.26 dB
-----------------	-------------------

#### CHANNEL SEPARATION (at 0 dB, 1 kHz)

Left/Right	78.4/79.0 dB
------------	--------------

### ADDITIONAL DATA

#### POWER REQUIREMENTS

30 Watts

#### RANDOM ACCESS TIME

5 Seconds

#### SCAN TIME

2 Seconds

#### DIMENSIONS

(HxWxD, in inches) 4 3/4 x 16 1/2 x 16 1/2

#### WEIGHT

16 Pounds

#### SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE

\$600

All measurements and charts supplied by APEL (Advanced Product Evaluation Laboratory).

# I'm Tired!

Fellow videographers, I'm tired. Tired of being looked upon as non-professional or substandard because I tape weddings and legal, event-type or other consumer-oriented activities. Tired of trying to explain professional video to a bride who demands the "world's best photographer" but is complacent with "Uncle Charlie's" video or is even looking to save a dime using the "instant professional" who purchased his camcorder last week, is reading the operator's manual this week and will pick-up his business cards next week. Tired of being ignored by equipment suppliers/manufacturers who refuse to give credence to the unique or specialized requirements of these markets. Tired of helplessly looking on as manifold markets are wasting away to public traditions, misconceptions and market immaturity in general. Tired of the tireless pursuit for specialized training from an "institutionalized video world".

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- \* Current faculty VIDEO EXPO/NATI
- \* 5 Yrs NSRA Certified Legal Video Spec.
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# TEST REPORTS



## SUMMARY Sharp Optronica Monitor/Receiver, Model 27NL20

This 27-inch set from Sharp's Optronica line demonstrates the company's continuing interest in high-performance video, and, generally, the 27NL20 delivers a strong picture in a size that'll appeal to videophiles who don't have enough space for a TV larger than 30 inches. The resolution this set provides will let you take full advantage of such high-resolution sources as S-VHS, laser videodiscs and ED Beta. Another big plus on this set is its TV tuner; it can receive a total of 209 channels, but more important, it's one of the most sensitive TV tuners APEL has ever tested. Simulation of fringe-area TV reception showed impressively little loss of color and introduced barely any video noise, or snow, into the picture. If you're not a cable subscriber and don't have the means to install a good outdoor antenna system at your home, this set could be a godsend.

As for the audio circuitry, the frequency response of the audio in/out loop was as good as anyone could want, covering the entire human-hearing spectrum with virtually no attenuation. The set's built-in multichannel television sound (MTS) decoder represented an improvement over the one on the last Optronica set we tested (the 31ND798, Jan. '89 VR, which got measly stereo separation), but still was less than exemplary, with separation levels only getting as high as 16.5 dB. MTS stereo frequency response was excellent, however, going out to 14 kHz, only a tad short of the 15 kHz MTS stereo transmission limit. Overall, while no knockout, the 27NL20 is a solid effort that delivers good features and performance.

## FEATURES

The set's 27-inch flat square picture tube is tinted for high contrast, which is a plus when watching in a brightly lit room. In this case it's particularly necessary, since the set's own maximum brightness level isn't all that high (70 footlamberts). The phase-locked loop (PLL) quartz-synthesized TV tuner can pick up 209 channel frequencies. The set also offers a variety of on-screen menus for adjusting sound and picture parameters (including bass and treble, brightness, tint and color); most of these adjustments can be made with the supplied remote.

In addition to its separate stereo audio and video line input and output jacks, the set has an S-video input for use with S-VHS, ED



Beta, Hi8 gear and some newer laser disc players. The set's internal speakers are automatically disabled when connections are made to the audio out jacks. However, the set has no provisions for connecting external speakers, so to boost sound, you have to hook up the 27NL20 to your stereo component system.

Four of your favorite channels can be memorized and called up via the set's remote control. In addition, the 27NL20 can memorize all the available channels in your area, so it will skip the "dead" ones when you're scanning for something to watch. Channel flashback lets you alternate viewing between two previously selected channels. The set has a sleep timer that shuts off the TV after a preset amount of time.

## LAB MEASUREMENTS:

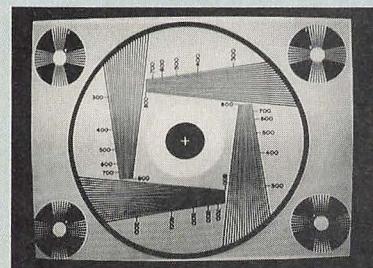
### Sharp Optronica Monitor/Receiver

Model Number: 27NL20  
Serial Number: 311431

## VIDEO SECTION

MAXIMUM USABLE LUMINANCE	70 Footlamberts
RESOLUTION (horizontal/vertical)	500/450 Lines
CONVERGENCE (center/corners)	0/.35%
VIDEO FREQUENCY RESPONSE	6.5 MHz
INTERLACE	60/40
TRANSIENT RESPONSE	Very Good
BLACK LEVEL RETENTION	90%
COLOR QUALITY	Excellent

### Resolution



## CONTROLS

Normally, only a few indicator lights (for stereo, power and SAP) are visible beneath this set's 27-inch screen. A control access door at the bottom of the 27NL20 hides a set of video and audio input jacks (convenient placement for camcorder hookup), channel scanning buttons, volume up/down buttons, MTS selection controls, a TV/video selector and a reset button that brings the sound and picture back to their factory settings.

These buttons are duplicated on the remote, which adds "favorite channel," "flashback" and picture and sound adjustment. A numeric keyboard aids in clock setting and direct channel access. A set of VCR operating buttons (which work with Optonica decks) is clustered on this remote as well, but in a way that won't confuse users.

The rear of this model has a set of audio/video input jacks. Since these jacks are parallel to the set on the TV's front, the 27NL20 will accept only one separate direct video input at a time. But the front A/V connection automatically overrides the one in back, so if there's a VCR connected to the set's rear inputs and the monitor/receiver's outputs are hooked into the VCR's input, attaching a camcorder to the front set of A/V

### AUDIO SECTION

#### SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO

(at 1,000 uV, A-weighted)	54.3/54.8 dB
Stereo (left/right)	65.3 dB
SAP	56.1 dB

#### TOTAL HARMONIC DISTORTION

(at 1 kHz, -20 dB)	.18/.19%
Stereo (left/right)	.87%
Mono	.41%

#### FREQUENCY RESPONSE

(at -20 dB, 100% modulation)	32 Hz to 14 kHz
Stereo	30 Hz to 3.2 kHz
SAP	28 Hz to 3.5 kHz

#### CHANNEL SEPARATION

(at 1 kHz, 100%/-20 dB, 100% modulation)	16.5/16.0 dB
Left Channel	16.5/16.0 dB

### AMPLIFIER SECTION

#### MAXIMUM OUTPUT

Audio Output	1.2 Volts
--------------	-----------

#### TOTAL HARMONIC DISTORTION

(1 kHz, at -10 dB)	.39%
Audio Output	

#### SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO

(A-weighted)	67.6 dB
Audio Output	

#### FREQUENCY RESPONSE

Audio Output	20 Hz to 20 kHz
--------------	-----------------

### ADDITIONAL DATA

PICTURE SIZE	27 Inches (diag.)
--------------	-------------------

POWER REQUIREMENTS	140 Watts
--------------------	-----------

DIMENSIONS	23 3/4 x 26 1/8 x 20
------------	----------------------

(HxWxD, in inches)	
--------------------	--

SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE	\$1,150
------------------------	---------

All measurements and charts supplied by APEL (Advanced Product Evaluation Laboratory).

jacks makes dubbing a snap. The S-video input and antenna inputs and outputs are also on the back.

## TEST RESULTS

The 70 footlamberts of brightness this set provided at maximum usable luminance will only be problematic if you put the TV in a bright, sunlit room—a placement we wouldn't recommend. Resolution of the set was superb, getting up to a full 500 lines horizontal and 450 vertical. Of course, the only consumer video source that can produce 500 lines of horizontal resolution is ED Beta; other high-res sources get up to around 400. This set can handle them all. Interlace measured a slightly imperfect 60/40 (50/50 is perfect), but we didn't find visible scan lines a big problem while viewing the set. The 27NL20 had virtually no overscan, so viewers can expect to see the total transmitted picture. As we mentioned earlier, the set's tuner is exceptionally sensitive, producing virtually noise-free pictures even when fed a minuscule (100 microvolt) signal. The excellent color accuracy did not suffer at low signal levels either.

The line level audio circuitry exhibited excellent frequency response from 20 Hz to 20 kHz, but things were not so stellar with the MTS decoder; alignment was off enough to degrade stereo separation at all modulation levels to little more than 16 dB. While that's certainly enough to provide a stereo effect, a greater amount of measured separation would have been welcome. Still, MTS stereo frequency response was good, extending to 14 kHz. Mono and second audio program (SAP) measurements were not particularly distinguished on this set, but these components of the MTS circuitry can still be said to serve their respective purposes.

The high picture quality, outstanding tuner section and the flexibility of the remote control go a long way in balancing out the set's shortcomings. And the suggested retail price of \$1,150 (certain to be marked down in stores) is pretty reasonable for such a model. Those looking for a good 27-inch TV would do well to look at this Optonica model.

—Len Feldman

### ABOUT THESE TEST REPORTS

Each piece of video equipment we test is a factory-fresh production model—the same quality you would buy in a store. After each product has been tested by APEL—Advanced Product Evaluation Laboratory, a leading independent testing facility headed by engineer Frank Barr—it goes to technical editor Len Feldman, an internationally recognized authority with more than 30 years' experience testing home entertainment products. He interprets the data and performs hands-on use tests of each piece of equipment, combining personal, practical experience with the most objective technical data available anywhere.

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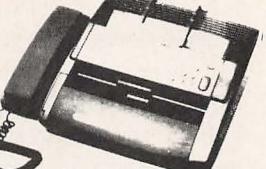
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# TEST REPORTS



## SUMMARY

### RCA S-VHS VCR, Model VR640HF

In a continuing effort among manufacturers to make the high-resolution S-VHS format more accessible to the general public, this second-generation RCA deck eschews esoteric digital features and concentrates on consumer-oriented value. The list price of the VR640HF is a reasonable \$999, and the quality of the picture it delivers makes it well worth the money. The compact design of the deck makes it fairly easy to integrate into a home video system without taking up a lot of space; the on-screen menus make timer programming and other functions very accessible.

Other features include program indexing and an array of non-digital special effects, such as freeze-frame and slow-motion viewing. There's also Hi-Fi audio recording and playback and an MTS (multichannel television sound) decoder for receiving stereo broadcasts. So the feature mix offers a good assortment of options without overwhelming the viewer who wants a VCR for basic time-shift/movie-watching purposes.

While the VR640HF isn't a perfect performer, in our tests it did well enough to stack up favorably against most S-VHS models. Frequency response extended out to 5 MHz, delivering the promised 400 lines of horizontal resolution. Other video parameters were fair to good. In the audio department, the MTS decoder was fairly well-aligned, delivering decent stereo separation and good frequency response. The only real disappointment was Hi-Fi frequency response, which did not capture the high end of the audio spectrum very well; response extended to only 9 kHz. But overall, we like this deck for its basic, user-friendly design, its affordable price and the very good picture quality of the S-VHS format.

## FEATURES

The frequency-synthesized TV tuner of this VCR can pick up 120 VHF, UHF or unscrambled cable signals. The eight-event/365-day timer is programmed via the supplied remote; the on-screen menus guide you through the programming process, so the only reason you need to go near the VCR for executing timer functions is to insert the tape. The VCR is of the four-head, double-azimuth variety, rendering its non-digital special effects (freeze-frame, frame advance, variable slow-motion, two-speed visible picture search) clear and clean, with virtually no noise-bar interference. TV chan-

nels in your area can be automatically memorized, clearing inactive stations.

Many of the VCR's functions are automatic; the deck powers itself as soon as a cassette is inserted, and if the cassette has no erase tab, play begins right away. Once a tape is over, the deck automatically rewinds the cassette and shuts off.

Delayed-start "express" recording enables the scheduling of a single recording event over a 24-hour period without going through all the usual timer-recording steps. Program indexing automatically places a signal at the beginning of every new recording on a tape, allowing you to find that

starting point without having to go through a tedious visual search.

In addition, the deck offers the aforementioned MTS decoder and Hi-Fi audio recording and playback.

## LAB MEASUREMENTS: RCA S-VHS VCR

Model Number: VR640HF  
Serial Number: 827240280

## VIDEO SECTION

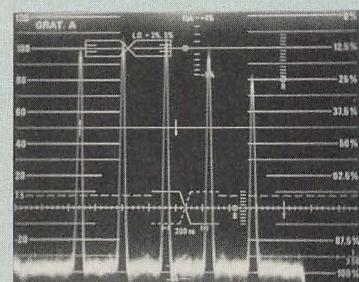
### FREQUENCY RESPONSE (at 4.20 MHz)

Video Output	
SP	-5.42 dB
EP	-2.50 dB
TV Output	
SP	-5.42 dB
EP	-2.92 dB
(at 5 MHz)	
Video Output	
SP	-13.4 dB
EP	-10.9 dB
TV Output	
SP	-16.9 dB
EP	-16.9 dB

### SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIOS

Red-Field Chroma (video output)	
SP (AM/PM)	42.4/38.5 dB
EP (AM/PM)	38.0/36.7 dB
Red-Field Chroma (TV output)	
SP (AM/PM)	41.4/37.8 dB
EP (AM/PM)	37.6/36.6 dB
Luminance (video output)	
SP (100/50/10 IRE)	42.6/42.8/44.2 dB
EP (100/50/10 IRE)	40.9/40.7/42.1 dB

### Stairstep Linearity (video output)



## CONTROLS

Almost every control you need for basic recording and playback is visible on the front panel: the power, tape transport, record, channel up/down, cassette eject buttons, memory and reset buttons for the counter display, audio-recording level controls and accompanying LED level meters and express-recording controls. The display on the right of the cassette slot shows time, counter number, channel number, tape status, reception mode of the MTS decoder, timer programming information and what input the VCR is receiving.

The hinged panel on the bottom of the VCR hides such secondary controls as tracking, tape speed, sharpness, tuner memory buttons and an FM simulcast switch for tapping stereo TV sound broadcast over radio.

The rear panel has coaxial and screw-terminal VHF and UHF antenna inputs and outputs, direct video and audio input and output jacks, S-video inputs and outputs, a special CATV adapter wire (for use with an optional RCA cable adapter), TV/CATV switch, channel 3/4 selector and convenience AC receptacle.

## TEST RESULTS

At 4.20 MHz, video frequency response for this deck was down by 5.42 dB in the SP mode through the video output. Curiously, response was even better at the slower EP speed, measuring -2.50 dB. Both these numbers are pretty good, reflecting the improved picture detail of the S-VHS format. Signal strength was weakened considerably at 5 MHz, where response was down by

13.4 dB at SP through the video output. Overall, the measurements demonstrate S-VHS's marked picture-detail superiority over conventional VHS decks, which usually peak at 2 MHz. Picture definition of tapes recorded off broadcast TV will be quite sharp; you may even forget you're watching a videotape.

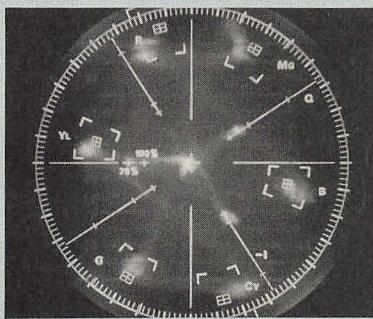
Luminance (brightness) signal-to-noise ratios varied from 42.6 dB to 44.2 dB, measured through the video output at SP, and fared almost as well through the TV output. But chroma (color) noise was a bit higher than we would have liked, especially the PM (phase modulation) noise, which measured only 38.5 dB at the SP speed. The noise is slightly noticeable in the overall picture, but it's not terribly distracting. Stairstep linearity (the deck's ability to reproduce the varying shades of gray between black and white) was quite good for the first four steps of the test, but the fifth step (which should have been the brightest, or "whitest") showed a departure from linearity of between 16% and 17%, depending on tape speed. Again, this did not detract too much from the picture. Helping matters quite a bit was color purity, which was close to perfect as was phase saturation and hue.

The frequency response displayed in the Hi-Fi audio recording mode was the biggest disappointment. While the Hi-Fi audio measurements on most VCRs are ruler flat from 20 Hz to 20 kHz (the entire human-hearing spectrum), on the VR640HF, response began rolling off (by -3 dB) at 9 kHz; at the point where the curve got to 20 kHz, response was down by nearly 7 dB. This doesn't signify the total absence of a high end, but it is somewhat disheartening, considering that conventional audio frequency response was flat to almost 10 kHz, effectively beating out the Hi-Fi section—the first time we've ever seen that happen—not that we found it particularly thrilling.

The MTS decoder was reasonably well-aligned, delivering good stereo separation (around 25 to 26 dB at midfrequencies, regardless of modulation levels) and excellent frequency response (out to 13 kHz, a tad shy of the 15 kHz broadcast stereo limit). SAP (second audio program) response was the best we've ever seen; while on most decks it dips sharply before it gets to 5 kHz, here it stayed flat out to 10.0 kHz, excellent response for what's primarily a spoken-word transmission system (meant for broadcasting bilingual soundtracks) anyway.

As we mentioned, this is not a perfect deck. But its \$999 suggested list price will probably be cut significantly by retailers, and with that in mind, this deck is a good introduction to the high-resolution S-VHS format, which has yet to take off with consumers. It's particularly appealing to video enthusiasts who don't have a yen for fancy features and editing capabilities but just want something good to *watch*. —Len Feldman

### Color Accuracy (video output)



### Luminance (TV output)

SP (100/50/10 IRE)	42.4/41.9/43.6 dB
EP (100/50/10 IRE)	41.4/40.8/42.6 dB

## AUDIO SECTION

### OUTPUT LEVEL

Conventional (SP/EP)	.49/.37 Volts
Hi-Fi (both speeds)	2.35 Volts

### THD AT REFERENCED OUTPUT

Conventional (SP/EP)	0.8/1.5%
Hi-Fi (both speeds)	2.3%

### WEIGHTED PEAK FLUTTER (DIN)

Conventional	
SP (avg/peak)	.11/16%
EP (avg/peak)	.3/37%
Hi-Fi	
SP (avg/peak)	.006/.007%
EP (avg/peak)	.003/.004%

### FREQUENCY RESPONSE (for -3 dB)

Conventional	90 Hz to 9.6 kHz
SP	62 Hz to 3.6 kHz
EP	
Hi-Fi	
SP	20 Hz to 9.0 kHz
EP	20 Hz to 9.8 kHz

### HARMONIC DISTORTION (at -10 dB)

Conventional (100 Hz/1 kHz)	.41/.36%
SP	.68/.45%
EP	
Hi-Fi (100 Hz/1 kHz/5 kHz)	
SP	.14/.26/1.58%
EP	.09/.28/1.58%

### SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO

Conventional (SP/EP)	51.5/49.1 dB
Hi-Fi (SP/EP)	88.8/89.9 dB

### CHANNEL SEPARATION (left/right)

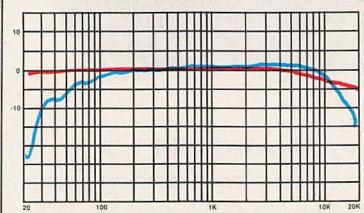
Hi-Fi	62.8/62.3 dB
SP	
EP	61.8/62.3 dB

## MTS DECODER SECTION

### SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIOS (at 100% modulation)

Stereo (left/right)	58.2/58.6 dB
SAP	59.2 dB
Mono	54.2 dB

### Hi-Fi Frequency Response



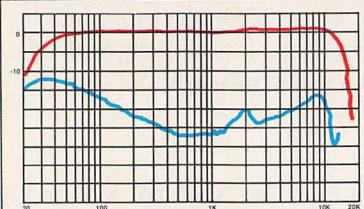
### TOTAL HARMONIC DISTORTION (at 1 kHz, -20 dB)

Stereo (left/right)	.15/.14%
SAP	1.1%
Mono	.46%

### FREQUENCY RESPONSE (at -20 dB)

Stereo	28 Hz to 13 kHz
SAP	20 Hz to 10.0 kHz
Mono	23 Hz to 4.0 kHz

### MTS Response and Separation



### CHANNEL SEPARATION (at -20 dB)

Stereo (left/right)	26.2/26.8 dB
---------------------	--------------

## ADDITIONAL DATA

### POWER REQUIREMENTS

32 Watts

### FAST-FORWARD TIME

(T-120 tape) 4 Min., 33 Sec.

### FAST-REWIND TIME

(T-120 tape) 4 Min., 32 Sec.

### DIMENSIONS

(HxWxD, in inches) 37/8 x 14 1/2 x 13 7/8

### WEIGHT

15 Pounds

### SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE

\$999

All measurements and charts supplied by APEL (Advanced Product Evaluation Laboratory).

# TEST REPORTS



## SUMMARY

### NAD Monitor/Receiver, Model MR13

This recent model from NAD is quite welcome, as it offers outstanding picture quality (450 lines of horizontal resolution) in a small set—the picture size is 13 1/4 inches. The MR13 makes a great, movable second set for the night table or den—wherever you want to put it. But more important, its small size makes it ideal as an editing monitor. Setting up an editing system around even a 20-inch monitor/receiver can be something of a hassle, but a 13-inch set is perfectly proportioned for such purposes.

The MR13 includes two video inputs (one direct, one for S-video), also a boon to home video editors. Adding to the set's versatility is its variety of stereo listening modes, 139-channel tuner, full-function remote and built-in MTS decoder for receiving stereo broadcasts. But the hallmark feature of this set is its high-quality picture, which is extremely bright and sharp with a great deal of clarity. It's unlike any other TV picture you've seen on a set of this size, and it's well worth a look.

## FEATURES

The microprocessor frequency-synthesized tuner in this set is compatible with VHF/UHF broadcast channels and all cable TV frequencies. As is usual with monitor/receivers, channel access is direct (by punching in specific numbers on the remote) or random (scanned up and down). The tuner can be programmed to skip inactive channels while scanning; this requires only the push of a button.

The MR13 has a sharpness control and a new circuit designed to provide sharper outlines and crisper definitions of objects in a picture. The picture tube is of the black-stripe matrix type, and the set's faceplate is tinted gray for optimum absorption of am-

bient light. This, combined with the 124 footlamberts of brightness the set gives off, makes for an extremely watchable picture even in brilliantly lit rooms. The set's comb filter retains wide video response with a minimum of color signal interference.

On the audio side, the MR13 gives you a choice of five stereo listening modes: through its own side-mounted speakers, through external speakers hooked up to the set's terminals, through self-powered speakers connected to the direct audio outs, through a separate amplifier system or through headphones.

The remote is a genuine "full-function" type; besides controlling power, volume and channel selection, it also duplicates virtual-

## LAB MEASUREMENTS: NAD Monitor/Receiver

Model Number: **MR13**  
Serial Number: **21609273**

### VIDEO SECTION

MAXIMUM USABLE LUMINANCE	124 Footlamberts
RESOLUTION (horizontal/vertical)	450/460 Lines
CONVERGENCE (center/corners)	0/0%
VIDEO FREQUENCY RESPONSE	6.0 MHz
INTERLACE	50/50
TRANSIENT RESPONSE	Very Good
BLACK LEVEL RETENTION	90%
COLOR QUALITY	Excellent

### AMPLIFIER SECTION

MAXIMUM OUTPUT	2.1 Volts
Audio Output	2.6 Watts
Speaker Output	
TOTAL HARMONIC DISTORTION (1 kHz, at -10 dB)	.15%
Audio Output	.21%
Speaker Output	
SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO (A-weighted)	
Audio Output	64.2 dB
Speaker Output	53.3 dB
FREQUENCY RESPONSE	
Audio Output	20 Hz to 20 kHz
Speaker Output	40 Hz to 20 kHz

### AUDIO SECTION

SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO (at 1,000 uV, A-weighted)	54/55.4 dB
Stereo (left/right)	
SAP	67.4 dB
Mono	
TOTAL HARMONIC DISTORTION (at 1 kHz, -20 dB)	.55/.38%
Stereo (left/right)	
SAP	.75%
Mono	.38%

FREQUENCY RESPONSE (at -20 dB, 100% modulation)	30 Hz to 11 kHz
Stereo	20 Hz to 1.5 kHz
SAP	28 Hz to 3.5 kHz

CHANNEL SEPARATION (at 1 kHz, 100% mod./-20 dB, 100%)	18.0/17.4 dB
Left Channel	17.8/19.0 dB

### ADDITIONAL DATA

PICTURE SIZE	13 1/4 Inches (diag.)
POWER REQUIREMENTS	76 Watts
DIMENSIONS (HxWxD, in inches)	13 1/4 x 15 1/8 x 14 1/4
WEIGHT	23 Pounds
SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE	\$429

All measurements and charts supplied by APEL (Advanced Product Evaluation Laboratory).

ly every sort of picture and audio adjustment the set offers. No matter how radically one readjusts the picture and sound, the push of a button brings the MR13 back to its factory settings. Also, if you leave the set on inadvertently and the channel you were watching goes off the air in the middle of the night, the set will automatically switch off 15 minutes later—a great feature for those who like to be lulled into dreamland but don't want to have to set the sleep timer.

## CONTROLS

Controls immediately visible on the MR13's front panel include power on/off, channel scanning buttons, volume up/down and the TV/video switch. Indicator lights inform you when the set is on and if a stereo or SAP signal is being received. A miniature stereo headphone jack is at the lower left corner of the set. Near that jack is a hinged door, behind which hide several secondary controls, including those for automatic channel programming and erasing, MTS selection and picture adjustment. The remote control adds numeric keys for direct channel access, a mute button and timer/clock buttons for setting the correct time and programming the sleep timer.

The rear panel contains external speaker terminals, a speaker selector switch, audio/video inputs and outputs and an S-video input. There are two sets of audio output jacks at fixed and variable levels.

## TEST RESULTS

Video frequency response on this set extended to 6.0 MHz. The corresponding horizontal resolution was 450 lines, enough to handle the high-detail picture quality of S-VHS or laser videodiscs. The 124 footlamberts of brightness was quite impressive; no matter how bright your room is, the MR13 will present a very watchable picture. Color convergence was perfect, as was interlace. Black level retention was a very good 90%. The perfect interlace combined with the small size of the screen makes scan lines virtually imperceptible. As for the TV tuner itself, it was sensitive enough to allow APEL's simulated fringe-area signal (100 microvolts at the antenna input) to produce a very watchable picture.

Audio frequency response via the line-level audio outputs was ruler-flat across the human-hearing spectrum, and even response via the external speaker outputs was very good, going from 40 Hz to 20 kHz. The internal amplifier of the set provides a low 2.5 watts per channel, but what do you want—this is a 13-inch set! Similarly, while the MTS decoder provided decent frequency response, stereo separation only got as high as 18.0 dB, not particularly dramatic but not too annoying in a set this size.

Overall, the MR13 is an excellent set that offers a wide variety of useful applications.

—Len Feldman

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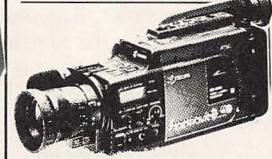
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# CELL OUT: CAMCORDER BATTERIES AND HOW THEY WORK

When was the last time you thought about your camcorder battery? If you're like most people, it was probably the last time your battery dropped dead in the middle of a big shoot. But knowing a little about batteries—as mundane as they may be—can mean the difference between a great day of shooting and a lousy one of lugging around an expensive electronic paperweight.

There are two types of camcorder batteries. The lion's share of camcorders use nickel cadmium (Ni-Cad) batteries, while camcorders manufactured by Matsushita (such as Panasonic and Philips models) employ lead acid batteries. Both work the same way all batteries do—with the negative electrode providing electrons to the camcorder and the positive electrode soaking up electrons from the camcorder. Batteries basically represent the completion of a circuit loop. But the active materials being transformed in camcorder batteries are quite different. In lead acid batteries, lead dioxide is converted into lead sulfate at the positive electrode, while at the negative electrode, sponge metallic lead is turned into lead sulfate. In Ni-Cad batteries, nickel oxyhydroxide reduces to nickel hydroxide at the positive electrode, while at the negative electrode cadmium metal is turned into cadmium hydroxide.

How do these electrochemical changes affect the overall performance of a battery? For starters, the two types lose voltage at different rates. The voltage of a lead acid battery falls off gradually as it is being discharged, until

it finally reaches the cutoff where the camcorder shuts down. That gives the user plenty of time—sometimes as much as 20 minutes—between the low-battery warning's first appearance and the camcorder's quitting for good. Ni-Cad batteries, on the other hand, deliver a very consistent voltage output right up to the point at which they are almost totally discharged. Then they fall off a cliff—meaning users of Ni-Cad battery camcorders had better wrap up their taping in a hurry (sometimes in as little as two minutes) once the low-battery indicator lights up.

But it's in recharging where the differences between the two types become critical. Lead acid batteries are most effective when they're immediately recharged after every use. In fact, it's best to store them in a totally charged state. That's why, as Tom Hitzges, Panasonic national marketing manager for camcorders, says, "You can take a lead-acid bat-

tery camcorder home from the store and start shooting without charging it." A lead acid battery that's stored too long discharged, or too deeply discharged on any occasion, may never perform to its potential again.

Ni-Cad batteries require almost the exact opposite treatment. Worked too gently and charged too often, they can develop a "memory" of their soft treatment and refuse to rise to the occasion when a long bout of taping is called for. Say you typically use your camcorder for about 10 minutes and then recharge it before putting it away. If you repeat that cycle more than a few times, the battery will eventually refuse to discharge for more than 15 minutes, no matter how juiced up it is at the start of a shooting session. That's why it's best to make sure a Ni-Cad battery is totally discharged before charging it up again. In fact, a near total discharge is the best way to in-

crease the life of a Ni-Cad battery. Using the camcorder for playback and rewinding tape can squeeze the last bit of life from a battery, and there are a number of consumer battery dischargers available today.

In recent years, refinements in technology have rendered the actual performance differences between lead acid and Ni-Cad batteries practically non-existent. "The Care and Feeding of Camcorder Batteries" (see box) will fill you in on some of the distinctions between the battery types.

## Video for Videographers

While those of us who make a living writing about video may resent the encroachment, we can't get around the fact that home video software is hornin' in on our turf. Case in point: *45 Minutes to Better Camcorder Video*, from Light Forms Video Productions (6627 S. 191 Pl., # F-105, Kent, WA 98032). True, its preliminary example of bad home video was so bad it gave me a headache, but otherwise, this tape is a solid introduction to camcorders themselves and to various picture- and sound-improving techniques. It also walks through a lot of ground that's been covered in these pages: lighting, camera steadiness, movement, scene transitions and more. But one of the best things about this tape is the way it refuses to coddle the viewer: The myth that you can just pick up a camcorder, start shooting and then play back great results is given the swift debunking it deserves. If you're getting (or giving) a camcorder for the first time, *45 Minutes* makes a fine companion piece. □

## THE CARE AND FEEDING OF CAMCORDER BATTERIES

### NI-CAD BATTERIES

- should be almost completely discharged before being charged again
- can be recharged approximately 1,000 times
- can lose as much as 10% of their power each year
- should be stored in a cool, dry place

### LEAD ACID BATTERIES

- can (and should) be recharged after every use
- can be recharged approximately 500 times
- can lose as much as 20% of their power per year
- should be stored in a cool, dry place



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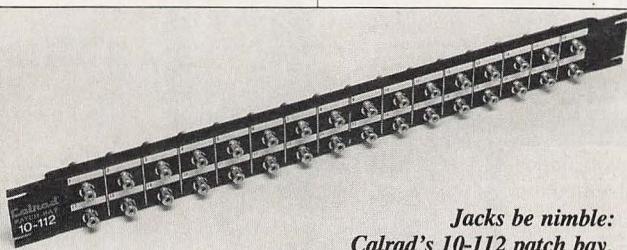
By Marc Wielage

# CONTROL CENTRAL: UNCOILING CHAOTIC WIRING

When was the last time you took a look behind your VCR? I mean a *really* good look. If you're like most videophiles, there's a veritable rat's nest of cables back there—twisted heaps of tangled video wire, audio connectors, antenna leads, forgot-

forewarned that installing such systems requires a degree of technical knowledge and soldering skill, as well as meticulous planning for the placement of each jack.

Consumer patch bays are hard to find, but we've gotten good service from a Teac PB-64, which is available from



*Jacks be nimble:  
Calrad's 10-112 patch bay.*

ten AC lines. And, whenever you need to dub from one machine to another, you've got to dive headfirst into this quagmire, struggle to find the proper connectors and then plug the wires into the right machine. What a mess!

There is a better way. Imagine having all of the jacks at your fingertips, right up front. Even better, suppose you could move all of these audio and video jacks to a central location? In essence that's the job of a **patch bay**, which is nothing more than a plastic or metal panel filled with a dozen or so audio and video jacks. It resembles the old telephone switchboards of the 1940s, into which operators manually plugged a wire to connect every phone call.

Manufacturers such as Westlake Village, California's Trompeter Electronics manufacture professional A/V patch bays, with a typical four-VCR/one-monitor setup selling for around \$350, including the appropriate cables. Be

suppliers specializing in semi-pro audio equipment. This mini-patch bay isn't much to look at, but it gets the job done. It includes standard RCA jacks on both sides of a small metal panel, which allows you to route all of your components' rear panel inputs and outputs to a central, front location. The PB-64 sells for around \$100 and allows you to patch a wide array of VCRs, disc players, processors, monitors, etc.

The 10-112, a 32-point patch bay that accepts either BNC- or RCA-type plugs, is available from Los Angeles' Calrad Electronics.

As useful as patch bays are, their minimalist, low-tech appearance isn't for everyone. A **routing switcher** takes the basic patch bay idea and adds automation. This electronic traffic cop patches a variety of sources together inside an attractive metal cabinet, using switches to match signals with destinations rather than manual patch cables. The router also

frequently includes a distribution amplifier, which splits one input into several outputs for simultaneous dubbing with virtually no signal loss.

Routing switchers are widespread throughout professional television broadcasting. The switchers in a network's master control headquarters, for example, cost millions of dollars and fill entire rooms with racks of relays and miles of wire.

Several consumer routing switchers are available for \$400 to \$1,000. Sony's SB-V1000 (\$600) is among the most full featured of such components. It handles up to six VCRs (three equipped with S-video), an auxiliary source (such as a laser disc player), an external A/V processor and a monitor. You can even mix and match input sources—combining the sound from a compact disc with the picture from a VCR and recording the result on another VCR. This can all be ac-

models to choose from. Sony and JVC have smaller selectors, the SB-V700 (\$380) and JX-S100 (\$125), respectively, which can interface with four A/V sources. Yamaha's AVX-100U (\$699) and Toshiba's XB-1000 (\$900) are also resourceful routing switchers—both of which add the benefit of Dolby Surround decoding. Accessory specialists such as Niles Audio, Recoton, Showline and Vidicraft also offer simple models, though none of them presently includes S-video capability. Additionally, such audio companies as Carver and Vector Research now include at least some rudimentary VCR dubbing function in their A/V receivers.

Which is the best approach, routing switcher or patch bay? Well, as slick and attractive as switchers can be, I still prefer patch bays; mainly because of their sheer expandability. If you add a few VCRs or another laser disc player, you just solder in a few more jacks,



*Electronic switcher: Yamaha's AVX-100U A/V amp.*

complished while watching something on a third VCR. JVC's JX-S900 (\$800) one-ups the Sony component in capacity with seven A/V inputs and a pair of monitor outputs.

If your system doesn't require this degree of complexity, there are several other

a handful of extra audio connections or even another panel. And, if you hate the patch bay's no-frills industrial look, you can build a cabinet to hide it when it's not in use. Which ever method you choose, it beats the old rat's nest approach any day. □

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## ...LAPTOP VIDEO

Continued from page 28

rently releasing personal video products using full-size VHS cassettes, there seems to be a role for the smaller VHS-C format in the future. In Japan, Panasonic is already selling a Super VHS-C personal video machine with a three-inch LCD screen and Hi-Fi sound. While the company has shown a similar AV Pocket Watch prototype in the US, it insists plans to sell it here are sketchy. In a clear nod to desktop video memo makers, the device includes a tiny external camera that attaches to the side of the recorder. Is this the video Dictaphone of the future? Citizen, meanwhile, has exhibited a

VHS-C prototype with a 2½-inch screen. (The fence-straddling Citizen has also exhibited an 8mm prototype.)

Perhaps the most striking new technology in VHS-C—or any other format—to be seen so far is JVC's Concept C, recently unveiled at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Chicago. Using the tiniest VHS-C tape transport yet, the new prototype makes possible a truly palm-sized playback system with a detachable LCD screen, tiny video-camera and other modular components. "We want to give more potential to video than it has ever had before," says Yoshihiro Ueno, director and general manager of JVC's video products division. Right now,

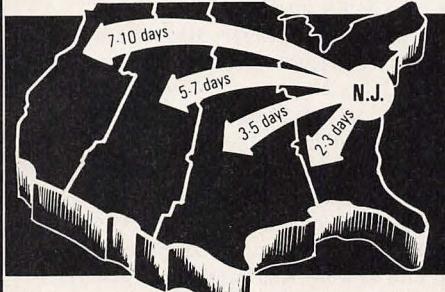
though, the product is still a crude prototype and a non-working one at that.

New promise for VHS-C's viability in the personal video domain can be found in JVC's recent introduction of a 30-minute VHS-C tape length, which boosts EP play time to 90 minutes. Matsushita, Panasonic's parent company, has also introduced a number of prerecorded "lifestyle" videotapes in Japan to support its VHS-C products there. JVC in Japan is also "looking into bringing out S-VHS-C software in the EP mode," says Ueno.

The introduction of Sony's 8mm Video Walkman, meanwhile, is apparently spurring greater distribution of prerecorded 8mm

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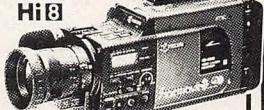
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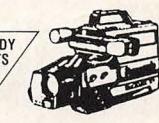
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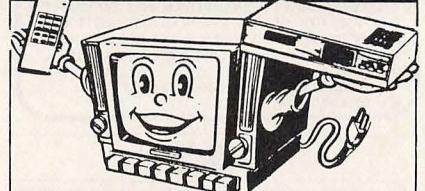


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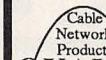
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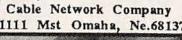
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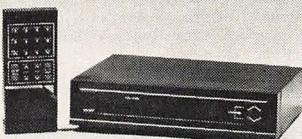
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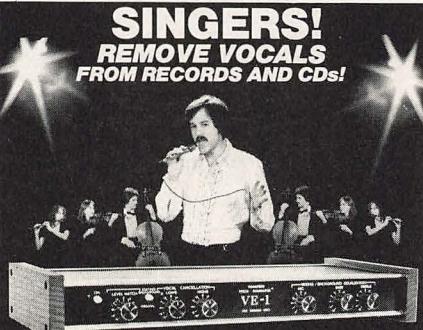
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# HDTV: It's the Size That Counts

BY LARRY THORPE

The chief executives of the nation's three top television networks recently offered Congress a generally lukewarm assessment of the importance of high-definition television. "On a scale of one to 10," ABC's Tom Murphy told lawmakers, "if the conversion from black and white to color was a 10, then HDTV would be a three."

These top US broadcasting executives aren't alone in their lackluster opinion of HDTV. Three separate surveys of ordinary TV viewers (conducted by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Media Lab, Home Box Office and the Committee for the North American Demonstrations of HDTV to the Public) have indicated that average consumers are less than wildly enthusiastic about HDTV. Does this mean those of us who've been trying to bring HDTV to the American public are misguided? Is HDTV overrated?

I don't think so. For one thing, no one has yet conducted a really fair viewer comparison between HDTV and today's NTSC pictures. The three studies done so far all compared HDTV pictures to NTSC pictures of roughly equal height—the main difference between the HDTV and NTSC TV monitors the viewers saw was the extra width of the HDTV screens. This approach may be perfectly valid for comparing technical picture quality. However, all three studies missed the most vital aspect of HDTV imagery, namely image size. It's the size of the image and the additional picture information on the screen—not picture sharpness *per se*—that gives HDTV its overall emotional impact.

A substantial body of research has established that the average US consumer views the TV screen from a distance of about seven picture heights. That translates into watching a conventional 27-inch set from about 10 feet away. At that distance, most of the limitations of the NTSC broadcasting standard are invisible. And the picture sharpness—or luminance resolution—is actually very satisfactory, *on camera close-ups*. The problems arise with more complicated scenes. For example, a close-up of a pitcher winding up may look fine, but when the camera pulls back to show the whole field, the numbers on the players' jerseys may become unreadable. TV camerapeople long ago learned to compensate for NTSC's lack of resolution by concentrating as much as possible on close-ups and medium shots. Just look at how many more close-ups are used in a soap opera than in a feature movie.

In short, the drawbacks of today's TV system are largely concealed

by the distance most of us sit from the screen and by camera technique. But we pay a price for these compromises: Today's TV image is a very small window. Typically, the TV screen takes up a mere 10° of the viewer's vertical angle of sight—it's a bit like watching the world through a paper-towel tube.

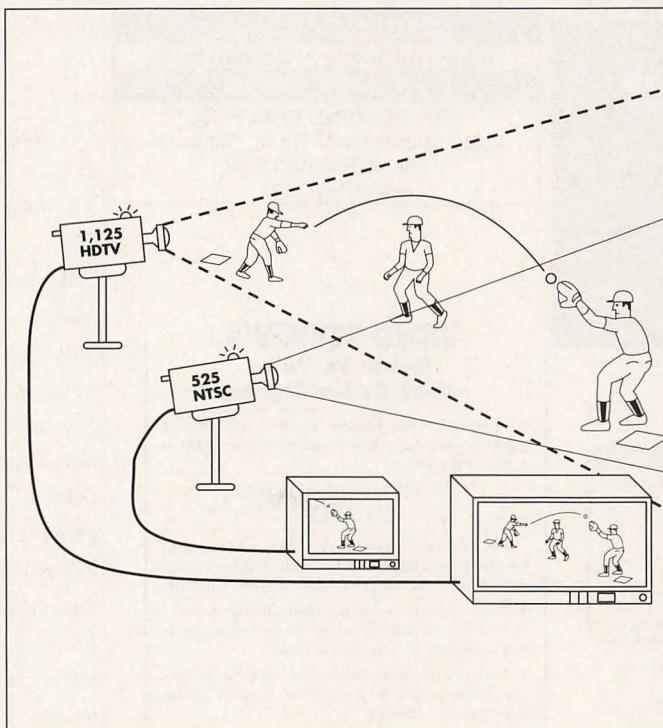
If you look at the much higher resolution of HDTV as a means to dramatically increase the size of the TV picture, HDTV's advantages become much more apparent. Imagine sitting 10 feet away from an HDTV set with a 75-inch diagonal screen. That would translate into a distance of about three picture heights between viewer and screen, or a 30° angle of view, and add up to a truly overwhelming viewing experience. That large-screen experience—combined with equally impressive CD-quality sound—is the real point of HDTV. Yet HDTV's large-screen potential has been completely ignored by all three viewer studies on HDTV.

The studies have also neglected to show how the HDTV screen would allow new types of image portrayal that would capitalize on the big picture. Today, we can produce a sharp image of a ballplayer on a conventional 525-line screen. If we shoot that same scene with a 1,125-line HDTV camera and widen the camera's field of view to capture the same resolution in the picture center as

the 525-line camera caught in close-up, a vital difference between the two pictures becomes obvious (see diagram). The HDTV picture contains additional picture information. We are portraying the player at the center of the screen with the same detail, at the same viewing distance, but we are providing a totally different viewing experience.

Bigger pictures are the essence of HDTV. And the effect isn't limited to live TV. A shift to large-screen HDTV would revolutionize home video, instantly eliminating the most critical differences between watching movies at home and in the theater.

Before broadcasting executives write off the importance of HDTV, it is essential for the industry to conduct valid comparisons between HDTV and NTSC. And that will mean gauging audience reactions to today's puny pictures and tomorrow's enormous ones. □



*Larry Thorpe, vice president for production technology at Sony Advanced Systems Co., has served on numerous committees that have contributed to the development of the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers' 1125/60 HDTV production standard.*

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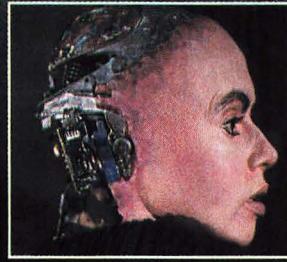
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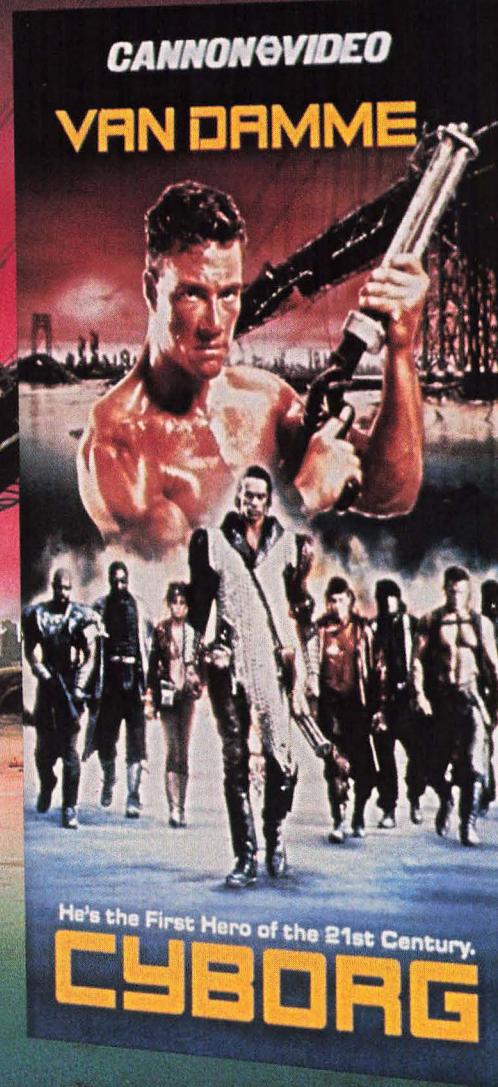
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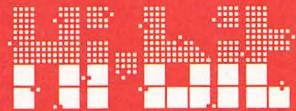


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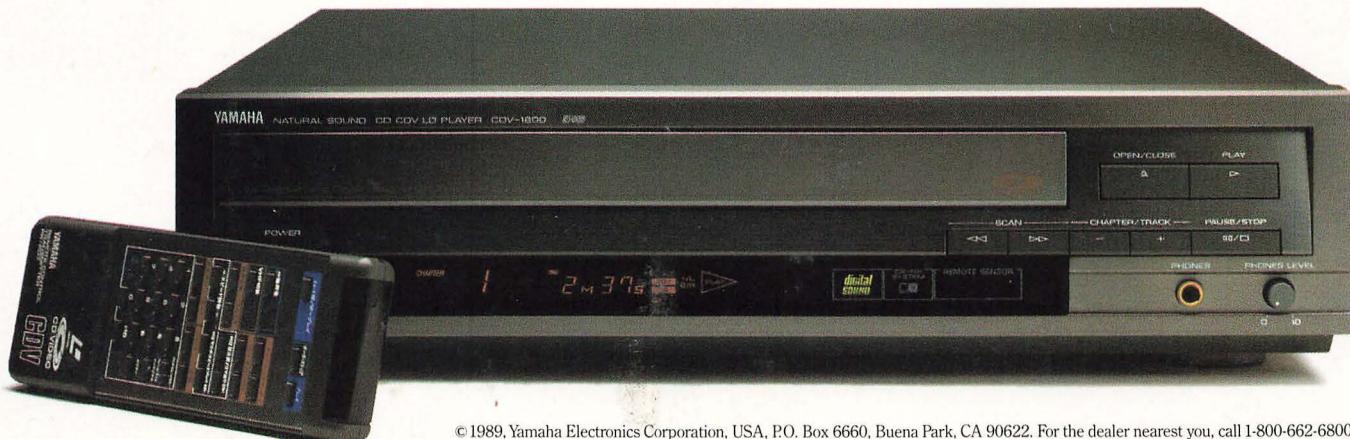
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